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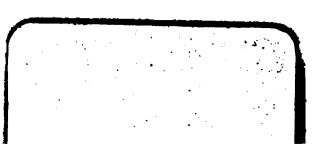

AN
(Chaucer G.)

LIFE

OF

GEOFFREY CHAUCER,

THE EARLY ENGLISH POET:

INCLUDING

MEMOIRS OF HIS NEAR FRIEND AND KINSMAN,

JOHN OF GAUNT, DUKE OF LANCASTER:

WITH SKETCHES OF THE

MANNERS, OPINIONS, ARTS AND LITERATURE

OF ENGLAND

IN

THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY.

BY WILLIAM GODWIN.

Come like shadows; so depart!

SHAKESPEAR.

IN FOUR VOLUMES.

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LIFE

OF

CHAUCER.

CHAPTER XVII.

MEMOIRS OF STRODE AND GOWER, THE CONFIDENTIAL FRIENDS OF CHAUCER.

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IT has already been observed that Chaucer has inscribed his poem of Troilus and Creseide to the "moral Gower" and the "philosophical Strode." These untitled and private individuals are probably to be considered as the author's friends and fellow-students; and the avowal of their friendship in this public and honourable way will appear to the acute observer no slight token of the integrity of the poet's mind. The persons whom Chaucer has thus thought fit to honour and commend in the face of his countrymen and posterity,

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have a just title to the notice of those who would study his life: happy if we could collect such satisfactory information concerning them, as might tend in any considerable degree to throw light upon the character of the man by whom they were distinguished. Among the companions of Chaucer's youth these were selected by him as his chosen associates; and it may well be supposed that an intimate knowledge of their tempers, fortunes, studies and pursuits would tend greatly to elucidate his. The following are the most considerable particulars which are recorded concerning them.

Notices of Strode.

Of Strode so little is known, that I am inclined not to suppress any part of it, but to put down all that is said of him by Leland, Bale and Pits. At the same time it is right to observe that these authors are entitled to a very limited credit in the details into which they enter, particularly the Protestant bishop, and the Romish priest. They are much more tenacious of the character of rhetorical declaimers, than of industrious collectors or faithful historians. An apt example at once

of their inattention and positiveness occurs under the article of Chaucer, where both Bale and Pits mention the duchess of Suffolk, wife to William de la Pole lord of Ewelm, who will hereafter appear to be the grand-daughter of Chaucer, by the appellation of Chaucer's sister. Yet these compilers, such as they are, are the only authorities we possess respecting the lives of the majority of the literary characters of ancient times in England. CHAP. XVII.

Leland, having occasion to speak of Chaucer's dedication of the poem of Troilus and Creseide, observes, "Who this Strode was I have not hitherto been able to discover in any author. But I remember to have read considerable commendations of one Strode, a student of Merton college in Oxford, a man very learned in poetry, and who in the catalogue of the members of this college is referred to the last years of Edward III. All that appears from the verses of Chaucer is that he had given considerable attention to the topics of philosophy[a]." by Leland.

[a] Leland, Scriptores Britannici, cap. dv.

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The person thus doubtfully referred to by Leland under the article Chaucer, is honoured with a separate chapter in another part of his work. The contents of the chapter are these. "Ralph Strode was one of the most illustrious ornaments of Merton college. He attached himself with singular devotion to eloquence and the muses; by whom he was so beloved in return, as to be enriched by them with a copious supply of grace, elegance and wit. This man, gifted with so many endowments, presented the public with a composition in elegiac verse, written with great neatness, sweetness and power of versification, and called from its subject Phantasma; as appears from the catalogue of learned men educated at Merton college in Oxford [b]."

by Bale.

To these particulars Bale has added that "he was pronounced by the sophists of Italy and France a most admirable dialectician.

[b] Leland, cap. ccccxxi. This catalogue is quoted by Wood, Antiq. Oxon. Tom. II, Collegium Mertonense.

When young, he was smitten with an ardent passion for eloquence and poetry, and cultivated the principles of these arts with such success, as to be deservedly entitled to the laurel. On his return from Italy, &c[c]." CHAP. XVII.

Pits is more confident and particular in his language on the subject. He calls him "a laureated poet of this island, member of Merton college, where he became acquainted with all the nicer and more delicate shades of the Latin speech, and eminently excelled in poetical composition. He afterward travelled through France and Italy, and lived in much familiarity and friendship with the most learned men of both countries. His manners were highly polished; his turn of mind was at once gay and acute; and he possessed the talent of adorning the most familiar topics of conversation with poignant and agreeable sallies, in the exercise of which talent he willingly indulged[d]." [This is definitive and by Pits.

[c] Bale, Scriptorum Britanniæ Catalogus, Cent. vi, cap. 44.

[d] Pits, De Illustribus Angliæ Scriptoribus, cap. 629.

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precise; Boswell could not be more direct in describing the tone of conversation of Johnson or Burke; it is exactly what we would wish to believe of the familiar and confidential friend of Chaucer; but where, we are naturally led to ask, did the learned Johannes Pitseus collect this minute information concerning a man, of whom we can scarcely be said to know any thing with certainty, except that he existed four hundred and fifty years ago?].

When Strode returned from Italy, he engaged in the controversy, then depending, respecting the dogmas of Wicliffe. His proceedings in this business are delineated with a very different feeling by the Protestant and the Popish historian. Bale thus describes his measures and their success. "When he returned from Italy, he began to ruffle his feathers against Wicliffe, placing his confidence in certain sophisms and tricks of logic. But the glory of God confounded his pride, and caused him to fall into the pit which himself had digged. Insomuch that his boasted sophisms and elenchs were found unable to

support either the fabled donation of Constantine, or the papal supremacy, or the obscene law of celibacy, or those masses of the devil, hours of superstitious laziness, and exhibitions of apish mummery. He vomited forth however, for the plague of posterity," certain works which the good bishop enumerates. It might be imagined that the above censures were fully adequate to the blackness of the poet's crime. The prelate however thought otherwise; and in the close of his little article goes out of his way to renew the invective. " He flourished," adds Bale, " under Edward III; and had the impudence to say, frontless hypocrite that he was! that the permission granted to priests to enter into wedlock with Christian women, was a shred of pagan idolatry."

The friendship of Chaucer could not save the " philosophical Strode" from this rude abuse. Pits however, the competitor of Bale, saw the matter in a different light. " Strode," says he, " like another David, rose against this blaspheming Goliah, and would not endure that Wicliffe, uncircumcised in heart,

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should defy the church of the living God. He took the sling of eloquence, and, with a smooth stone from the brook of truth, smote the adversary on the forhead, that he fell; then, drawing the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God, he at one blow cut off the head of this doctrine of devils."

Both these writers agree to fix the period of Strode's greatest eminence and fame to the year 1370. According to Tanner[e], the Phantasma and some other of his works were printed in quarto at Venice, with the comments of Alexander Sermoneta, in 1517.

Conjecture respecting Strode in Urry's Chaucer.

The writer of the Life of Chaucer prefixed to Urry's edition has endeavoured to add to the stock of information respecting this friend of our author. For that purpose he has extracted[f] a Latin colophon, or postscript, from a manuscript copy of Chaucer's treatise of the Conclusions of the Astrolabie, the sense of which is, "Here ends the trea-

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[e] Bibliotheca Britannica, art. Strodæus.

[f] Life of Chaucer, note 4 Z

tise of the conclusions of the astrolabe, compiled by Geoffrey Chaucer, for the use of his son Lewis, at that time a student of the university of Oxford, and under the tuition of the most excellent philosopher Master N. Strode." CHAP. XVII.

From this passage the writer infers that the person to whom Chaucer inscribed his Troilus and Creseide, was afterward tutor to Chaucer's son. But there are two difficulties in the way of this inference. First, that the person whom Leland treats as Chaucer's friend appears to have been named Ralph, while the person spoken of in the manuscript, as the tutor of Chaucer's son, is named N. probably Nicholas. The biographer says indeed, that "the Christian name of the friend to whom Chaucer dedicates, according to Leland, was Ralph; but according to others, Nicholas." In the first of these assertions he appears to be mistaken; Leland has an article treating of Ralph Strode, but does not affirm this Strode and Chaucer's friend to have been the same person. The biographer says, that the

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Christian name of Chaucer's early friend was "according to others, Nicholas." But he has not named these others: and it is probable that, arguing viciously and in a circle, he had in his mind this very colophon to the manuscript of the Astrolabe. Warton however, seduced by the authority of this writer, has fallen into the same mistake, and gravely informs us, without referring to any testimony to support his statement, that the early friend of our poet was "eminent for his scholastic knowledge, and tutor to Chaucer's son Lewis at Merton college in Oxford[g]."

A further objection to this hypothesis, arises from the chronological view of the question. The Troilus and Creseide has appeared to have been written about the year 1350. It is dedicated to Gower and Strode; and, as the author was then a very young man, it is likely that the latter, as well as the former, of the persons to whom

[g] Hist. of Eng. Poetry, Vol. I, Sect. xiv.

it is inscribed, was his senior. It is not therefore very probable that an eminent philosopher, who was elder than Chaucer, should in the year 1391, when the treatise of the Astrolabe was written and when Chaucer was already sixty-three years of age, be the college-tutor of a child of ten years old, which Chaucer tells us was the standing of "lytel Lowys his sonne." This circumstance, together with the difference of the Christian name, seems to be decisive against the supposition that Chaucer's early friend was at any time tutor to the poet's son.—The writer of the Life prefixed to Urry curiously concludes with informing us, that Strode was "a great follower of Wicliffe." CHAP. XVII.

Biography of Gower.

Of Gower, the other contemporary the mention of whom is introduced by Chaucer in his Troilus and Creseide, we have already had occasion to speak[h], in determining the question whether he or Chaucer were entitled to the honours of eldership in English

[h] Chap. XI.

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poetry. But though it then appeared that Chaucer had clearly the priority, yet Gower, when stripped of his unfounded honours, will still be found entitled to a very distinguished share of applause. He was a poet, though not an English poet, before Chaucer: this is the most obvious inference from the epithet "moral," which Chaucer in his early work bestows upon him. Such an attribute it is not natural to assign to one who is not in some way before the public: and, if Gower were before the public, it was most probably as an author; and, if as an author, most probably a poet. When in generous emulation of his contemporary, he felt impelled to write verses in his native tongue, he showed himself certainly not inferior in this new department of the poetic art, to what he had previously appeared in Latin and in French. He was not unworthy to be the fellow-labourer of Chaucer in the task of polishing our language; and there is a refinement of sentiment, and a gentle flow of expression in his English poetry, which sets him far above his successors of the fifteenth century.

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His profession.

Many conjectures have been formed, for they deserve no better name, as to his profession and original destination in life. Leland not only makes him a lawyer [i], but represents him as having been "sumtyme chief Juge of the Commune Place [k]." Afterward however, in the same volume [l], he has this memorandum: "Mr. Ferrares told me that Gower the Juge could not be the man that write the bookes yn Englisch. For he said that Gower the Juge was about Edward the Secundes tyme." Meanwhile, there is no Gower a judge appearing on our records of these early times. It certainly is not very probable that the man who, in an advanced age, wrote the tender, but incestuous, tale of Apollynus of Tyre, and the somewhat licentious story of Florent, or the wrinkled beldam who in her bridal bed is converted into a beauty, should have filled a station of this sort. That he was not a knight, as most of

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[i] Scriptores Britannici, cap. cccexciii.

[k] Itinerary, Vol. vi. fol. 15. [l] fol. 61.

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our old writers[m] have made him, is sufficiently evident from the addition *armiger*, in the original epitaph inscribed upon his tomb[n].

His family.

An equal degree of obscurity hangs over his origin and the place of his birth. Leland[o], Bale[o], Pits[o] and Hollinshed[p] derive his extraction from the Gowers of Stittenham in the county of York, whose family is now represented by the marquis of Stafford. Caxton however, an older authority than any of these, affirms him, in the title of his edition of Gower's *De Confessione Amantis*, to be a native of Wales[q]. On this supposition it is not improbable that he was related to Henry Gower, fellow of Merton college in Oxford, and bishop of St. Davids, who died

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[m] Leland, Bale, Pits, Puttenham, Peacham, and the Theatrum Poetarum.

[n] Selden, Titles of Honour, Part II, Chap. v, §. 47.

[o] Art. Goverus, Gower.

[p] Chronicle, A. D. 1413.

[q] In the Biographia Britannica, the same thing is asserted of the title to Berthelette's edition of 1532. That edition lies before me, but does not contain what the Biographia produces it to vouch.

in 1347[r], when our poet was upward of twenty years of age; a coincidence which might further incline us to believe, with Mr. Speght, that Chaucer and Gower as well as Strode were members of Merton college; were it not that it would appear strange that in the memorials of that college, which seem to have been kept with unusual accuracy, the names of Strode and many others should be recorded as authors, while those of Chaucer and Gower are wholly omitted.

His connections.

Whatever may be determined respecting Gower's profession and rank in society, it seems certain that he was attached to Thomas of Woodstock duke of Gloucester, in a manner similar to that in which Chaucer was attached to John of Gaunt. To his connection with this nobleman we shall presently have occasion further to advert.

His blindness.

Gower was probably the senior of Chaucer, and he certainly survived him. Toward

[r] Godwin, De Præsulibus Angliæ, Episcopi Menevenses, A. D. 1328.

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the close of his life he became blind, as he has himself informed us in a Latin epilogue to his verses "Unto the Worthy and Noble King Henry IV," usually printed in the works of Chaucer.

Henrici quarti primus regni fuit annus,
Quo mihi defecit visus ad acta mea.
Omnia tempus habent, finem natura ministrat,
Quem virtute sua frangere nemo potest.
Dum potui, scripsi; sed nunc, quia curva senectus
Turbavit sensus, scripta relinquo scholis.

The same circumstance is repeated in a manuscript dedication of an improved copy of the *Vox Clamantis*, to Arundel archbishop of Canterbury[s].

But though Gower suffered more than the common infirmities of old age, he had, to balance this, the pleasure of living long enough to witness the overthrow of the

[s] MSS. Oxon. in Coll. Omn. Animarum, No. 26, apud Bio. Britan. art. Gower, note C, and Warton, Vol. II, Sect i.

prince by whom his patron had been destroyed, and the vengeance that pursued his destroyer. That this circumstance afforded consolation and pleasure to the still affectionate heart of the venerable old man, we may well infer from this extraordinary fact; that, though he is admitted to have survived the deposition of Richard only two years, and during the greater part of that time was decrepid and blind, being more than seventy years of age, yet he revised several parts of his *De Confessione Amantis*, in reference to that memorable event; and the greater part of his minor poems, as may be perceived from their titles hereafter recited, were written subsequently to that period, to congratulate his country in various styles on the happier æra that was dawning upon it, under the auspices of a grave, a wise, and a well disposed monarch.

Opulence of Gower.

That Gower was a man of some wealth we may reasonably conclude from this circumstance. The monastery of St. Mary Overies, as well as a great part of the borough of Southwark, having been destroyed

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by fire in the year 1212, Gower contributed largely to rebuild the conventual church; in the north aisle of which he prepared for himself a burial-place, where his effigies were placed stretched upon a monument, crowned with a wreath of ivy intermixed with roses, and with a collar of SS round his neck, his three principal works being represented as sustaining his head [t].

His works.

Beside the works of Gower mentioned in a former chapter [u], there are, annexed to the manuscript of his *Vox Clamantis* in the British Museum [x], the following smaller pieces: 1, *Cronica Tripertita Johannis Gower, de Depositione Richardi II & Coronatione Henrici IV:* 2, *Encomion Henrici IV:* 3, *Contra Demonis Astutiam in Causa Lollardiæ:* 4. *De Virtutibus Regis, ad Henricum IV:* 5, *De Vitiorum Pestilentia sub Ricardo II:* 6, *Contra Mentis Sevitiam in Causa Superbiæ:* 7, *Contra*

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[t] De Confessione Amantis, Edit. 1532, Preface. Leland, Script. Brit. Stow's Annals, 1400.

[u] Chap. XI, p. 212.

[x] Cotton MSS. Tiberius, A. iv.

Carnis Lasciviam in Causa Concupiscentiæ: 8, *Contra Mundi Falatiam in Causa Perjurii & Avaritiæ:* 9, *De Lucis Scrutinio, contra Tenebras Vitiorum:* 10, *Poemata Varia Johannis Gower, Liber, ut videtur, ipsius autoris.* All these are in Latin, and in verse. CHAP. XVII.

Friendship of Chaucer and Gower.

We have sufficient grounds to believe that these eminent poetical contemporaries were long and intimately friends. Chaucer's compliment to Gower may with the greatest probability be referred to the year 1350; and the compliment of Gower to Chaucer which has been quoted[y], is found in the *De Confessione Amantis* written in 1393.

But great as their friendship may reasonably be supposed, it has been adorned with some circumstances by the writers upon this subject, which are not founded in fact. Leland says[z], that Gower, "having remarked the genius and ascertained the probity of Chaucer, admitted him into his friendship,

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[y] Chap. XI, p. 207, 212.

[z] Scriptores Britannici, cap. dv.

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received him with open arms, made him the companion of his hours of relaxation, and honoured him as a sort of divinity. What Gower indeed has himself declared in his *De Confessione Amantis* renders any comment of mine [Leland's] unnecessary, where he has shown the high estimation in which he held Chaucer, descanted upon his particular excellences, treated him as a most admirable poet, and made him as it were the Aristarchus of his work. Behold then, reader, a most honourable strife of virtue! Gower, a man little confident in his own endowments, modestly submits his lucubrations to the judgment of Chaucer; while Chaucer on the other hand refers his Loves of Troilus and Creseide to the combined suffrages of Gower and Strode."

In this statement there are certainly many supositititious particulars. The foundation of most of Leland's errors in this point seems to lie in his having supposed Chaucer to be a much younger man than he really was; and accordingly, in the introduction to the above passage, he represents Gower, " in the last

years of Richard II," as "a man of venerable age, and who had applied himself with great assiduity to the cultivation of the English language," at the same time that his manner of speaking relatively to Chaucer, in the lines immediately following, plainly implies, that he regarded him as a young man of dawning talents and considerable promise. Gower did not make Chaucer the Aristarchus of his composition; for no such circumstance occurs in the passage already cited, the only one in which he mentions Chaucer. And Gower was very far from leading the way to Chaucer in the "assiduity with which he applied himself to the cultivation of the English language;" since Chaucer wrote English in 1346, and probably earlier, and Gower, so far as can be traced, did not commence English writer till 1393. CHAP. XVII.

Mistakes, made by a man of character like Leland, are generally handed down from age to age without further examination. Dryden[a]

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[a] Preface to his Fables.

CHAP. XVII.

represents Chaucer as "employed abroad and favoured by Edward the Third, Richard the Second, and Henry the Fourth." Dr. Johnson[b] describes him as the "disciple" of Gower. And in the same manner Mr. Speght remarks that Gower "termeth Chaucer a worthie poet, and maketh him as it were, the Iudge of his workes[c];" and the coadjutor of Urry affirms that Gower "addresses Chaucer as a judge of his works[d]."

His moral character impeached.

The reputation of Gower in point of moral worth has suffered materially from the unconsidered censures which have been passed upon his character by several writers who have had occasion to mention him. One author says[d], that he "was a man of singular learning and great piety; but much given to change with the turns of state." Afterward[e], improving upon the vehemence

[b] History of the English language, prefixed to his Dictionary.

[c] Edit. 1598, sign. b. iii.

[d] Life, sign. d, Urry's Edition.

[e] Life, sign. e, Urry's Edit.

of the accusation, he remarks that "the respect Chaucer retained for his former master Richard, and gratitude for the favours he had received from him, kept him from trampling upon his memory, and basely flattering the new king; as most of his cotemporaries did, and particularly Gower, who, notwithstanding the obligations he had to Rich. II, yet when old, blind, and past any hopes of honour or advantage, unless the view of keeping what he enjoyed, basely insulted the memory of his murdered master, and as ignominiously flattered his murderer." Mr. Tyrwhit observes in nearly the same tone[f], that the principal variations he has been able to discover in the different copies of the *De Confessione Amantis*, are that "every thing which Gower had said in praise of Richard in the first edition, is either left out or converted to the use of his successor," in the second. CHAP. XVII.

It must be admitted that such variations vindicated.

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[f] Canterbury Tales, Introductory Discourse, note 15.

CHAP. XVII.

occur between the different copies of Gower's English work. But the inference which, by insinuation or direct impeachment, has been made of Gower's baseness and ingratitude, is by no means lightly entitled to credit. Few particulars in the English history are involved in greater obscurity (as we shall have further occasion to remark hereafter), than the fluctuations of party during the reign of the unhappy Richard. But the modern writers upon this topic speak with as much peremptoriness and confidence, as if the merits of the case were completely before them. They talk of the "obligations Gower had received from Richard." "Obligations" is a convenient term; and a careless reader is easily induced to believe that the writers had a long catalogue of benevolent attentions and substantial rewards, which it only depended upon their own pleasure to have set out in terrifying formality. Yet all that we know on the subject, we have received from the lips of Gower himself, who informs us that, one day, the king rowing on the Thames near London, accidentally

met our poet who was also on the river, and having issued his gracious command to Gower to come into the royal barge, was pleased to enjoin him to "boke some newe thinge[s]." CHAP. XVII.

This is the sum of the formidable mass of obligations conferred by Richard upon Gower, so far as it has come to the knowledge of the present times. It has much more the air of a trick of state, one of the artifices which men in high station often so well understand, for cajoling their inferiors, and giving themselves a show of literature and patronage, than any real generosity. When we consider who was Gower's protector, a circumstance to which we shall presently have occasion to advert, it is most probable that the king merely regarded Gower as his instrument, and made use of the occasion to do a pleasing thing to the powerful man of whom he stood in awe. The poet however took it all in serious part, and gravely set

[s] Prologue to the first copies of the *De Confessione Amantis* apud Preface, Edit. 1532.

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himself to compose an immense work, in eight books, and in more than thirty thousand verses. What reward did Richard confer upon him for this unexampled stretch of obedience? We do not know that he even condescended to read a single verse, of the thirty thousand which were thus laid at his feet. It is extremely probable, considering the troubles which accompanied the last years of Richard, and the excessive fickleness of that monarch's temper, that Gower, after all his assiduity, obtained nothing but hopes and baffled expectation in return for what he had done. Such was the vast weight of obligation, which the poor poet was bound for ever to remember.

But Gower, after Richard ceased to be a king, suppressed those general compliments, with which this work, written at his command, was originally interspersed, and placed his reign precisely in the point of view in which it has been seen by all posterity. Perhaps it was not exactly graceful to retract praises bestowed upon his nominal patron, just at the period when his power to reward

was no more. But, if we look a little narrowly into the motives of Gower, we shall find it at least as probable that they were of a generous, as of a sordid cast. His great protector through life, whom he has continually celebrated in the poem in question under the figure of the swan, which was that protector's emblem [h], was Thomas of Woodstock earl of Buckingham and duke of Gloucester, one of Richard's uncles. This nobleman during several years of his nephew's reign was all-powerful, and governed the young monarch with a rigorous hand. It is not improbable that the moment in which Richard honoured Gower with his notice, was during the period of Woodstock's greatest prosperity, and when Richard was eager to do every thing to avert his displeasure. The tide of fortune however at length turned against the duke. In one of the vicissitudes of party with which that reign was so pregnant, he was made a prisoner, and shut

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Gower's real patron.

[h] Anstis, Register of the Garter, Vol. I, p. 118.

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up in the fortress of Calais. Richard then with great pomp prepared a bill of accusation against the duke and his real or pretended confederates, and issued a mandate to the governor of Calais to bring him to London for trial. The answer was that he had suddenly died of an apoplexy; and it was afterward proved that he had by the king's command been forcibly smothered in his bed[1].

The duke of Gloucester was a prince who stood high in the public favour, and this execrable act of assassination contributed more than any thing else, in little more than a year after, to hurl the monarch from his throne. Gower lamented the untimely destruction of his protector in the most plaintive strains. If then he even took some pleasure in the subsequent fall of Richard, is it not natural to attribute his feeling to a generous sentiment of indignation? Gloucester was a nobleman of distinguished talents,

[1] Cotton, Abridgment of Records, First Parliament of Henry IV.

and Richard the weakest of mankind. Gower regarded the fate of Richard, who was deposed in full parliament, and in whose adversity scarcely any man sympathised, as a just retribution for the foulness of his crime. He mixed his own personal sentiment, arising from the pious remembrance of Gloucester's benefits, with the public and patriotic feeling of the deliverance of his country; and he gave them vent. The anguish of his loss, and his horror at the manner of it, were too honest, to allow him to reflect whether it was decorous to utter severe truths over the body of a fallen foe. What now shall we think of Gower's baseness and ingratitude in return for the obligations he had received from Richard; which are invidiously aggravated by the biographer, with the recollection that at the period of his ingratitude he was "old, blind," and past the power of active service?

The writer whose remarks we are considering, rounds his period by stating that Gower "basely insulted the memory of his murdered master, and as ignominiously flattered his murderer." How king Richard

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perished is a question for ever wrapped up in the veil of obscurity: various tales have been told, and all founded in invention or in conjecture. The thing of which we are assured is, that in February 1400, five months after his deposition, his body was exposed to public view in the city of London[k]. How does this writer know that Gower's verses (who survived only about two years) were written in the months which followed, and not rather under the immediate stimulus and impression of the wonderful event, the elevation of the house of Lancaster, which he had just witnessed?

Capriciousness of fame.

It is thus that reputation, applause and infamy, are distributed. "History is the impartial umpire of human affairs, the vindicator of merit, and the scourge of crimes." It should be so. But, as it is commonly written, we may fairly pronounce of Fame, that she is not less blind than Love. She scatters about her honours and her disgraces

[k] Walsingham, ad annum.

with a profuse and undistinguishing hand. She is often the mere echo of popular and fugitive calumnies, and often aggravates them with her own rancorous inventions. We shall see still more glaring instances of this in the progress of this work. Particularly, men like our poet, who have proved themselves the benefactors of mankind, frequently encounter the harshest treatment. Men who have accumulated knowledge and been the luminaries of their times, who have laboured for the delight and instruction of their species, and have recorded in imperishable works their benevolence, their affectionate nature, and their anxiety for the cause of morals and virtue, mankind seem to have a singular satisfaction in regarding, in their personal transactions, with a severe, fastidious and jaundiced eye. CHAP. XVII.

But, however we may decide upon the transitory favour of Richard, and the transitory gratitude of Gower for his sovereign's supposed condescension, an instance of the frailty of human attachments remains to be mentioned which no generous spirit will

Breach between Chaucer and Gower.

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refuse to regret. The friendship of Chaucer and Gower, which probably commenced in their college days, and which we are sure continued undiminished for more than forty years, ceased to exist while both the parties were yet living. Chaucer is construed as throwing out an indirect sarcasm against Gower in the prologue to his Man of Law's Tale [l]; and the compliment to Chaucer in the epilogue to Gower's *De Confessione Amantis*, is suppressed in some manuscripts of that work [m], being probably withdrawn by the hand of the author.

Whether Gower were intoxicated with receiving the royal command to "boke some newe thinge," and afterward saw the folly of yielding in this point to the whispers of vanity; whether he sympathised with the ambition and daring views of Thomas of Woodstock, or looked on with some degree

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[l] Canterbury Tales, ver. 4497: see Tyrwhit, Introductory Discourse, §. xiv.

[m] Tyrwhit, Introductory Discourse, note 15.

of indifference at his tragical fate; are points comparatively of small importance to the observer of imagination and feeling: CHAP. XVII.

> Princes and lords may flourish, or may fade;
> A breath can make them, as a breath has made:

but that two men like Gower and Chaucer, with so many points of sympathy, with so great a similarity of pursuits, both lovers of learning, both inspired with taste, both cultivators and refiners of their native tongue, at a time when so few minds existed congenial with their own,—that two such men, after having known each other so intimately, and mutually looked to each other for fellowship in amusement and relief in adversity during so long a period, should afterward come to view each other with eyes of estrangement, indifference and distaste,—forcibly impresses us with a sort of despondence, with a feeling (not merely hostile to the empty and frivolous delusions of ambition; but) as if refinement was nothing, as if faculties were nothing, as if virtue was

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nothing; as if all that was sweetest, and all that was highest in human nature, was an idle show, was pure "vanity and vexation of spirit."

But however we may lament the estrangement here spoken of, it is impossible for us to determine as to the degree of blame to be attributed to the respective parties. Nothing can be more difficult in the ordinary stream of human affairs, than for even the best informed person to judge where the honour and where the blame lies in any transaction dependent upon the shock of tempers and opinions. Each party has his own story to tell, which in most cases shows plausible and fair, till the story of the other has been told; and, when we have heard both, it is probable that, from the difference of dispositions, habits, views and prejudices among men, we shall see that each party feels solemnly assured of the justice of his own conception, and astonished at the distorted and obstinate make of that of his neighbour. But the smaller features of human transactions are scarcely visible to any but the most in-

timate connections of the parties, and the materials, such as they are, of forming a judgment, are never brought before the world. In the case of the estrangement of Chaucer and Gower, we do not even know who was the aggressor or who the aggrieved; and therefore cannot possibly determine whether he who thought himself injured, had good ground for his complaint; or whether on the other hand his complaint originated in misstatement or misapprehension, in superfluous delicacy or unreasonable expectation. One thing only we are entitled to conclude, that for two men, whose studies were the same, and who, of any persons of their age and country, were the nearest in rivalship, to have maintained, in the midst of all the convulsions of parties, a steady and unabated friendship for forty years, argues an integrity, a candour, and a generosity of spirit, rarely to be met with in the annals of mankind. CHAP. XVII.

Literary character of Gower.

The high and merited reputation of Chaucer has in every age, from the close of the fourteenth century to our own times, thrown

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an undue degree of shade upon the literary character of Gower, and even taught some persons to speak of him with a sort of contempt. He has the faults of his age; his versification is rude; and he seems insensible to the deformity of obtruding upon his readers whole pages of prosaic, feeble, flat and unnecessary lines: but from this defect, as we have seen, Chaucer himself was not exempt. Gower was a phenomenon in the age in which he lived, and he received generally from his contemporaries that species of consideration and homage to which his endowments entitled him. His ballads in French are many of them the offspring of a delicate, susceptible and poetical mind.

Emulation of Chaucer.

Though it is not true that Gower led the way to Chaucer in the art of writing English verse, yet if we refer to the two principal works of each, the *De Confessione Amantis* and the Canterbury Tales, we shall find that Gower did lead the way to Chaucer in the idea of constructing a magazine of poetical stories in English verse. We may therefore fairly consider Chaucer as having

borrowed the idea of his greatest and most admired work from the labours of his learned contemporary. He has even told some of the same stories; though I do not think it can justly be said, as some of the writers on these topics have perhaps inadvertently phrased it, that he took the stories from Gower. Chaucer rather went to the same sources as his rival, and Englished the stories in his own way, but still with the honours acquired by his contemporary full in his eye. This circumstance surely places the inferior poet in no contemptible point of view. It reminds the reader of taste, of the contention of Voltaire against the elder Crebillon, who treated three dramatic subjects (Semiramis, Orestes and Catiline), chiefly because Crebillon had treated them before him. This is at least a generous and manly emulation, infinitely superior to the little arts of conspiracy and cabal. It contains in it by implication a confession of the honour and estimation in which the competitor is publicly held, and an acknowledgement that the more recent author does not regard the competition

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as matter of degradation; and if in the sequel the elder writer is vanquished, he is only buried under a heap of laurels; and may console himself that that which causes his obscurity, is a ground of elevation and pride to his country and his race. Another circumstance which is worthy to be mentioned in this slight enumeration of the literary deservings of Gower, is that what is usually considered as the best of his tales, the tale of Apollynus of Tyre, has avowedly furnished materials for the beautiful drama of Pericles Prince of Tyre, a play which is commonly printed under the name of Shakespear, and which, in sweetness of manner, delicacy of sentiment, truth of feeling, and natural ease of language, would do honour to the greatest author who ever existed.

Tale of Apollynus of Tyre.

Conclusion.

In looking back to the characters of Strode and Gower, the confidential friends of Chaucer, we shall see much to reflect credit upon the man who fixed his attachment upon such intimates and friends. They appear to have been both honourable and wise men, masters of all the learning of their times, and distin-

guished for powers and acuteness of intellect. Stróde however, the vigorous adversary and opponent of Wicliffe, must unquestionably yield the palm to Gower. It is with another sort of temper and feeling from that due to an elegant scholar and an acute controversialist, that we are bound to look up to one of the great founders of our language, a man who bore his part in these early times in breaking the intellectual ice of our northern climate, and who contributed to usher into our land those sublime votaries of the muse, by whose admirable productions our country has been enabled to eclipse every other nation of the world.

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QUESTION WHETHER CHAUCER STUDIED AT PARIS, AND IN THE INNER TEMPLE, CONSIDERED.—TRUCE BETWEEN ENGLAND AND FRANCE.—LAW AND LAWYERS OF THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY.—STATUTE OF TREASONS.—PALAMON AND ARCITE.—TRANSLATION OF BOETHIUS *DE CONSOLATIONE PHILOSOPHIÆ*.

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Chaucer's residence in France affirmed by Leland.

LELAND reports of our author, that he finished his studies at Paris. "Chaucer," says he, "at the period of his leaving Oxford, was already an acute dialectian, a persuasive orator, an elegant poet, a grave philosopher, an able mathematician, and an accomplished divine. These no doubt are lofty appellations; but whoever shall examine his works with a curious eye, will admit that I have sufficient ground for my panegyric.

"I must however," continues the vener-

able historian, "ingenuously confess, that his studies at Oxford were not so complete, but that he added much to the stock of his science by the ardour of his application at another place. We find, after leaving Oxford, that he spent several years in France, and acquired much applause by his literary exercises in that country. His fame followed him on his returning home; and, animated by his success abroad, he resorted to the societies and courts of justice in his native metropolis, which he had perhaps also frequented previously to his residence in France[a]." CHAP. XVIII.

denied by a modern critic.

Mr. Tyrwhit has thought proper to call in question the authority of Leland in this and other particulars relating to Chaucer, and has endeavoured to reduce the life of the poet to a dry extract of the records of those of our English sovereigns whom Chaucer served. This is certainly a very unreasonable and extraordinary way of treating historical evidence. Public and official records of the early

[a] Scriptores Britannici, cap. dv.

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Principles of historical evidence.

incidents of Chaucer's life we can scarcely expect to find. Mr. Tyrwhit says, "these travels in France rest entirely on the authority of Leland[b]." And upon what authority are we to expect them to rest? What sort of appearance will be exhibited by modern and by ancient history, if the authority of the eldest writers is to be treated as of no weight? We ought undoubtedly to distinguish between the different classes of evidence; but it would be an idle and ruinous scepticism to blot out of our narratives every thing which is not to be found in official records and gazettes. When a man of a sober and calculating mind reads the histories of Herodotus or Sallust, he knows that he is reading a tale, a multitude of the circumstances of which may be real, or may be imaginary. But he does not on that account regard them as unworthy of notice: he on the contrary receives them with a certain moderated degree of belief.

[b] Canterbury Tales, Preface, Appendix C.

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The mode of estimating historical evidence in doubtful cases, which has usually been adopted by capable enquirers, has been; where the representation, for instance, of the monastic historian, as William Fitzstephen or Matthew Paris, or even of the poet, as Homer, sufficiently coincides with the practices and notions of the times, and with what might have been expected from generations of men circumstanced like those which he has attempted to describe,—there to admit his representations without scruple. Let us try the statement of Leland by this test.

Resort of Englishmen to the university of Paris.

Nothing can be more certain than that it was the frequent custom in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, for Englishmen who were carefully educated, to proceed, after having finished the course of their studies at home, to the university of Paris. We have already had occasion to allege several instances of this [c], among a multitude which might be produced. Wood, in treating of

[c] Chap. XIV, p. 262.

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these instances, says, in the example of Grossteste, "he went over to Paris, following in this the practice of every Englishman eminent for learning[d];" and in that of Roger Bacon, "he visited this university, in conformity to the practice of all the more learned English, particularly those who had been bred at Oxford[e]." Why should we imagine that the result of historical reasoning is, to lead us to deny to Chaucer, the most eminent literary character of his time, all those advantages of institution and example which were best calculated to conduct him to that eminence?

Chaucer's extensive acquaintance with French literature.

Leland, in his remarks upon the subject, makes a very natural observation. It was during the years that Chaucer resided at the university of Paris, says he, "that he imbibed all the beauties, elegance, charms, wit and grace of the French tongue to a degree that is scarcely credible." Nothing indeed can be more indubitable than that Chaucer

[d] Wood, A. D. 1228. [e] ditto, A. D. 1292.

was a consummate master of the language, and of all the literary productions which had then appeared in France. How are we accustomed to reason, previously to all historical evidence, upon instances of this sort, happening under our own observation? We naturally say, "This man must certainly have lived in France." CHAP. XVIII.

Deficiencies in Leland's account of Chaucer.

Mr. Tyrwhit reinforces his incredulity by observing that, "Leland's account is full of inconsistencies." Leland is indeed erroneous in his chronology, and appears to have supposed Chaucer to have been born and to have died thirty years later than he actually did. In treating of Chaucer's studies at Paris, he refers them expressly to the concluding years of Richard II. But, though glaringly defective in his dates, he has introduced no inconsistencies or contradictions into his statement of the consecutive series of Chaucer's education.

We have a right indeed to infer, from Leland's egregious mistakes of chronology in this point, which he might probably have corrected from the inscription on Chaucer's

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tomb in Westminster Abbey, that he was not, at least in this instance, a very careful collator of documents. But the most careless examiner of facts and incidents is right, in more instances than he is wrong. Every one acquainted with the writings of Leland, will acquit him of having forged the tale. His language on the subject is peremptory: he thought therefore that he was proceeding on sufficient authority. Who will venture to decide, what sort of authorities and documents existed in Leland's time, which may have perished between that time and the present?

Period of Chaucer's studies in France.

If Chaucer studied in France, it must have been during the truce between the rival monarchs, which was continued by successive prolongations from September 1347 to June 1355. The distance at which we live from the period of the wars of Edward III. causes us somewhat to exaggerate to ourselves the degree of animosity then subsisting between the two countries. The accidental pretension of affinity to the crown of France, which was varnished over by courtiers and lawyers, was rather used by that monarch as a graceful

ornament to his achievements, than as a serious preliminary to so mighty an acquisition. A young and gallant prince held it his duty in those ages to discover some occasion for war; and a war such as that between England and France, was regarded in prospect as only a more magnificent and extensive species of tournament, however differently it was felt in the event by a countless multitude of the miserable victims of this ostentation. Thus, when king John of France was taken prisoner by the Black Prince, his gallant conqueror immediately forgot the holiday tale of John's usurpation, and without difficulty yielded to him the priority, and declared that, being himself but a subject, he knew too well what was due to majesty, to assume the freedom to sit in his presence[f]. In the peace of Bretigni, the successful and victorious conclusion of these broils, the main article, an article which could scarcely ever in the process of the contest be said to be seri-

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[f] Froissart, Vol. I, chap. clxviii.

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ously out of the recollection of the contending parties, was that Edward should renounce for ever, for himself and his heirs, the style and title of king of France, and all pretensions upon the crown and sovereignty of that country.

Chaucer then, in visiting France, would no doubt find an hospitable and cordial reception. The young nobles of either kingdom were in the habit of resorting in crowds to the tournaments of the other: if it had not been so, Philip of Valois would not have found it necessary to issue the edict, which has been already mentioned [s], prohibiting his subjects from repairing to the tournament proclaimed by Edward in 1344: and it is well known that the literary worthies of either kingdom were not less welcome to the other, than its warriors.

Chaucer found a country, afflicted and humbled by the events of the campaign of Poitiers, but not destroyed. France had by

[s] See above, Chap. VII, p. 138.

no means cast off her gallantry, her liberality, her refinement or her pride; and the pretensions of the university of Paris to be the centre and source of literature to the Western world, do not seem to have been in the least impaired. CHAP. XVIII.

Our traveller and student was probably sprung of Norman ancestors, a race of men to whom, as we have seen, may with probability be ascribed the effusions which constitute, as it were, the first point in the admirable series of modern European poetry. He did not therefore visit Paris as a stranger, but as a brother, as a descendant of their first instructors in the arts of intellectual heroism; and the glittering trophies of the victory of Poitiers no doubt reflected a graceful and commanding light upon the countenance of the youthful Briton. We may, without danger of being erroneous, believe that Chaucer was courted, honoured and beloved; and, in the language of our honest, original antiquary [h], that "he gained to him-

[h] Leland, ubi supra.

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self great glory, from the manifestation of the quickness and ripeness of his talents, in that country."

Chaucer's studies in the inns of court discussed.

The story of Chaucer's studies in the Inner Temple certainly does not rest upon better authority, than that of his matriculation in the university of Paris. Mr. Tyrwhit however, who is disposed in affairs of this nature to assume the prerogatives of an absolute monarch, tells us, that he is "inclined to believe" the one, and to reject the other.

Leland informs us, that "Chaucer frequented the courts of justice in London, and the colleges of the lawyers;" but he does not accompany this assertion with an expression [*constat*] so affirmative of absolute knowledge, as when he speaks of his studies in France. He says not a word of the Inner Temple. And, if a mistake in chronology can vitiate his testimony, it certainly must be set aside in this instance, as he plainly refers this branch of Chaucer's education to the last years of Richard II, or rather to the commencement of the reign of Henry IV.

But the authority which of late has been

principally relied upon with respect to Chaucer's legal education is that of Mr. Speght, who in his Life of Chaucer says, "Not many yeeres since, Master Buckley did see a record in the same house [the Inner Temple], where Geoffrey Chaucer was fined two shillings for beating a Franciscane fryar in Fleet-streete." This certainly would be excellent evidence, were it not for the dark and ambiguous manner in which it is produced. I should have been glad that Mr. Speght had himself seen the record, instead of Master Buckley, of whom I suppose no one knows who he is; why did he not? I should have been better satisfied if the authority had not been introduced with so hesitating and questionable a phrase as "not many yeeres since:" and I also think that it would have been better if Master Buckley had given us the date annexed to the record; as we should then at least have had the satisfaction of knowing whether it did not belong to some period before our author was born, or after he had been committed to the grave. Much stress therefore cannot be laid upon the supposition

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of Chaucer having belonged to the society of the Inner Temple.

Let us however for a moment conceive of Chaucer as a student at law, and let us examine what ideas and conceptions would have been produced in his mind by this study.

History of law in the fourteenth century.

Law was in the fourteenth century a science not without ample materials to exercise the speculations of the curious enquirer. In the darker ages, the trial by ordeal, by combat, and by the oaths of a certain number of compurgators, almost universally prevailed; and certainly nothing can be imagined more foreign to equity, reason, and the exercise of the intellectual faculty, than these practices. But, as the cultivation of letters advanced, these modes of decision were gradually exploded.

In Chaucer's time there may be said to have existed among us four codes of law, each of independent origin, each of considerable magnitude and subtlety, and all worthy of deep and attentive investigation.

1. Civil law.

In the year 1137 a perfect copy of the Pandects of Justinian was accidentally dis-

covered at Amalfi in Italy. The Roman law had been constructed more upon the principles of an abstract science, and advanced higher pretensions to being a system of impartial equity, than perhaps any other code that ever existed: it seemed to have grown less out of the customs and prejudices of any particular age and country, and to have been better adapted for immortality. When the barbarians of the north overran the fertile provinces of the Roman empire, they were totally incapable of understanding the refinements of this code; and it referred to combinations and modes of which they had hitherto had no experience. Accordingly it was by them speedily consigned to oblivion, and the forms of decision suited to a horde of savages, were substituted in its room. But, between the period of its extinction and accidental revival, many changes had occurred in society, and large strides had been taken toward civilization and refinement. The Roman law therefore was received as an inestimable treasure, and its principles studied with unexampled avidity.

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2. Canon law.

The canon law was a system of a different sort, but is perhaps to be regarded as a more memorable monument of the energies and daring of the human character. Almost all its provisions tended to one point, the forwarding and securing the mighty ascendancy which the church acquired over all ranks of men in this early period of modern history. Chaucer was born only about a century and a half after the martyrdom of Thomas of Becket and the memorable spectacle of the penance of Henry II. The expeditions for the conquest of the Holy Land had not long been terminated; the rumour and murmuring sounds they left behind were yet audible; and, even after the death of Chaucer, monarchs still talked, in a grave tone and with a serious countenance, of taking the cross, and marching for Palestine. The power of the church was to a considerable degree ruined; but its symbols and monuments covered the land; and abundance of motives existed, to induce a philosophical mind to study the code, which at once inforced and recorded its pretensions.

The feudal law was a system not inferior in nice correspondence of a variety of complicated parts, and the harmony of a whole, to any invention of man in society. It is now the main key for explaining the different codes of civil policy prevailing in almost every country of Europe; and it was still more interesting in the time of Chaucer, as few of its provisions were as yet completely abrogated. It is principally to the feudal system that we owe the distinguishing features of modern, as contrasted with ancient Europe, that we belong more to our families and less to the state, that we are more of men and less of machines. The great chain of subordination in the feudal law, has generated among and entailed upon us a continual respect to the combinations and affections which bind man to man, and neighbour to neighbour. We are no longer broken down to one level, and into one mass, under the unsympathising and insensible government of institutions and edicts; but live in unforced intercourse one with another, and consult much oftener the dictates of feeling

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and promptings of disposition, than the inventions of legislators. The consequence of this is, that we remark and treasure a thousand little sentiments and emotions, which the ancients deemed below or foreign to their consideration; and our characters, cherished by the warmth of a less artificial mode of society, unfold a variety of minuter lineaments and features, which under other circumstances in man have been blighted and destroyed. The feudal system was the nurse of chivalry, and the parent of romance; and out of these have sprung the principle of modern honour in the best sense of that term, the generosity of disinterested adventure, and the more persevering and successful cultivation of the private affections.

4. English constitution.

The three modes of law which have just been mentioned, were already, in the fourteenth century, in some measure a tale of other times, and led the student back to the page of history, and the manners of preceding generations. There was a fourth mode which was yet in its infancy, that had all the graces of novelty, and allured the enquirer

by the attractions of a prophetic curiosity. This was in the time of Chaucer the system of several of the most favoured countries of Europe; but has now become by way of distinction the English constitution. It originated in the growth of commerce and of cities, which gave to the plebeian engaged in merchandise an importance that could no longer be neglected in a public and liberal system of government. Contemporary, or nearly so, with the rise of the burgesses, or inhabitants of towns, was that of the yeomanry, better understood in Chaucer's time by the appellation of franklins, or little freemen. From these two classes, the burgesses in the towns, and the rural freemen, or small holders of land, was composed the third estate, comprising in every civilised country, the most valuable and numerous branch of the community. Whatever may be decided respecting the abstract value of such a constitution, consisting of clergy, temporal lords and commoners, it was a mighty acquisition to the cause of human nature at the period

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when it was introduced, and must have been regarded with all the fondness of affection and hope by a liberal mind in the fourteenth century.

The English constitution in its most essential features was the produce of the thirteenth century, and went on in a continual train of improvement during the whole remaining dynasty of the Plantagenets. The progress of political institution, as well as of literature, was fatally interrupted by the wars of York and Lancaster; and a system of despotism, though of a less malignant aspect than that introduced in France and other countries, was established by the usurping Tudor, and perpetuated through the whole of the sixteenth century.

Early writers on English law.

The books in which Chaucer may be supposed to have studied the laws of his country are various, and have most of them descended to our own time. The laws of our early kings, as William the Conqueror and Henry I, have been digested into a sort of system, having annexed to them the names of the princes

to whose reigns they belong[1]. A similar collection was made in the reign of Henry II, which bears the name of Ranulph de Glanville, chief-justiciary in the latter part of that reign, and is regarded as the first performance which has in any degree the air of a general treatise on jurisprudence, written after the dissolution of the Roman empire. The charters of our kings, limiting the prerogative, and defining the feudal and other rights of the subject, from Henry I. to the memorable epoch of Magna Charta, were also familiar to the recollection, and dear to the hearts, of the ancient English. At length an able, copious, and comparatively elegant writer on English law, rose toward the end of the reign of Henry III, in the person of Henry de Bracton, whose work was received as the most authentic system and compendium on the subject, down to the time of chief justice Coke in the reign of James I. Several other

[1] They are published in Wilkins's collection of *Leges Saxonicæ, &c.*

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treatises formed a valuable supplement to that of Bracton; particularly Fleta, a sort of appendix to this author; and Britton (perhaps merely a diversity in writing the name of this venerable lawyer), an abridgment of Bracton's treatise, drawn up in the French language: both these works were the offspring of the period of Edward I. The *Mirrour des Justices* has been ascribed by some of our antiquaries to the time of the Saxons; but, at least in the form in which we possess it, has internal marks of a much later date, and probably belongs to the reign of Edward II: it bears the name of Andrew Horne. These different works were sufficient to give to the student an idea of the institutions of his country; and to familiarise to his conceptions that regularity of proceeding, and those maxims of jurisprudence, which, in every state, are necessary, to give confidence to the subject, and to maintain in the human mind a certain sentiment of independence and dignity.

Modes of pleading.

A feature essential to the history of law, as it was known and practised in these times,

is the particular mode of pleading which then began to be introduced. We have already had occasion to remark the persevering and assiduous cultivation of the art of logic, in its influence upon the branches of education cultivated in our universities. The perfecters of the art of logic were the schoolmen. The object to which they principally applied it, was theology; and undoubtedly, however great may be the mischiefs in other respects which have arisen from this cause, a dogmatical religion has a strong tendency to defecate the grossnesses and subtilise the powers of human intellect. A similar mode of reasoning soon transfused itself into our courts of law; and it seems in a higher degree to have preserved its original character to the present times, in the bar, than in the church. Nothing can be more forcibly contrasted, than the mode of pleading among the ancients, and that which has characterised the processes of the moderns. The pleadings of the ancients were praxises of the art of oratorical persuasion; the pleadings of the moderns sometimes, though rarely, deviate into

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oratory, but principally consist in dextrous subtleties upon words, or a nice series of deductions, the whole contexture of which is endeavoured to be woven into one indissoluble web. Several striking examples have been preserved of the mode of pleading in the reign of Edward II, in which the exceptions taken for the defendant, and the replies, supporting the mode of proceeding, on behalf of the plaintiff, in no respect fall short of the most admired shifts, quirks and subtleties of the great lawyers of later times [k].

Venality of the administration of justice.

Passing from the laws themselves, and the arguments of the pleaders, our picture of the administration of justice in these early times cannot be complete, without also adverting to the characters of the judges, and the temper of their decisions. The king was regarded by our ancient constitution as the fountain of justice; he frequently sat as president in his courts; and, when he was absent, the

[k] Year-Books of Edw. II, apud Reeves, History of English Law, Chap. XII.

judges were considered as his delegates, representing his person. When the fountain of justice therefore was tainted, we may easily conceive that the inferior streams were impure. From our ancient records it appears, that every thing under our early Norman sovereigns was venal, and that, as in the present courts of the East, no one presumed to approach them with any suit, unless at the same time he accompanied his demand with a present. These presents are openly entered upon the rolls of the royal revenue, accompanied with a statement of the purposes for which they were given, and betraying no indication that the slightest impropriety was apprehended to belong to such transactions [1]. Unless the present given were enormous, it is extremely probable that this was considered as no deviation from the regular administration of justice.

Attempts for its reformation.

It seems not to have been before the commencement of the thirteenth century, that

[1] Madox, History of the Exchequer, Chap. XI, XII, XIII.

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any considerable attempt was made to give to the proceedings of our courts a graver and more dignified character. We have already had occasion to advert to a memorable instance of the imperfect administration of justice under Henry III [m]: some progress however was made in the attempt to purify and exalt its measures in that reign. Edward I, a prince of stern and rigorous temper, and who appears to have applied his mind with considerable ardour to the subject of legislation, made a strict inquest into the conduct of his judges, the result of which was that all, except two, were convicted of malversation in office, and fines were set upon them, to the enormous amount of one hundred thousand marks [n]. We must not hence conclude however that they were more depraved than their fellow members in society; it is probable they did no more than their predecessors had been accustomed to do with im-

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[m] Chap. VII, p. 122.

[n] T. Wikes, A. D. 1289, apud V Scriptores, à Gale.

punity. Nothing more frequently occurs in the history of mankind than a reform, commenced by the punishment of individuals who only continued to do what long custom had authorised, and who, considered as to disposition only, were almost exempt from blame. The punishment of one of the judges of Edward I. is said to have been for the offence of altering a record, by means of which the fine imposed upon a poor man was changed from thirteen shillings and four-pence to the half of that sum. It is remarkable that the law-treatise entitled Fleta, published at this time, is so called, as we are informed by its author, on account of its having been composed by him under confinement in the Prison of the Fleet: he was therefore probably one of these unfortunate victims to the improved manners and correcter sentiments of the times in which he lived. The man who, while suffering under a charge of disgrace and dishonour, applies his compulsory leisure to studies the purpose of which is public improvement and happiness, is certainly not altogether a bad member of society.

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Instances of the degradation of the judicial character.

While we are treating on this subject of the reputation of the judges, it may be proper to recollect the case of Tresilian, chief justice of the court of King's Bench, and Brember, a puisne judge, who were executed at Tyburn in the year 1388. Their offence was the opinion they had given upon certain questions proposed to them by Richard II; and it may be doubted whether, at least upon most of these questions, they could without a violation of integrity have decided otherwise than as they did. They fell a sacrifice to the triumph of an adverse party in that turbulent reign. Yet, such is the nature of popular impressions, that the ignoble catastrophe they sustained, has tarnished their memory to all subsequent ages, and been the cause that their names have been loaded with opprobrium and the imputation of a variety of crimes. When men whose hearts should be pure, and their office respected, are thus treated with open contumely, it is impossible that the profession to which they belong should not be brought into a certain degree of discredit, and that the liberal feelings with

which it ought to be exercised should not be somewhat withered in the hearts of its adherents. Such incidents indeed may be considered in a double point of view; they influence the opinions of survivors as to the dignity of an office the holders of which are brought to such ignoble punishment, and they demonstrate the comparatively cheap estimate in which such persons must have been held by their contemporaries, when a punishment of this sort was not deemed wholly unsuiting and inapplicable. The lord-treasurer, lord-chancellor and archbishop of Canterbury were put to death in a like ignominious manner, by the populace, seven years before.

In further illustration of this point it may be worth while to remark, that the salary of the puisne judges of the king's bench, from 1269 to 1440, with some variations, was forty marks, and that of the chief justice forty pounds, *per annum*°. Forty pounds during

° Dugdale, Originales Juridiciales, cap. 40.

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this period were equivalent to one hundred and twenty pounds of the present time, in weight of silver, and are computed to have been equal in efficacy to six hundred pounds of our money [p]. After the year 1440, the salaries of the judges experienced a small augmentation.

Statute of treasons, 25 Edw. III.

While speaking of the law as it stood in the time of Chaucer, it would be unpardonable not to notice the memorable statute passed in the year 1351, defining the nature of treason. This has been regarded by all competent judges as one of the main pillars of English liberty. Treason being a crime for the detection and punishment of which the whole state, and the governors of the state, are armed against the individual, the least ambiguity or uncertainty as to the nature of this crime is so far an invasion of the personal security of every inhabitant of the country. Law and reason could be in no mean and contemptible condition of growth

[p] Anderson, History of Commerce, A. D. 1313.

in an age which gave birth to such a statute; nor can we with justice refuse our veneration to a race of men, who had the courage of heart and the clearness of judgment to demand so strict a limitation, and to secure it to their distant posterity. CHAP. XVIII.

Chaucer considered as a lawyer.

Chaucer is supposed to have been bred to the bar. If he practised in the profession, for however short a time, he must have contracted some habits of thinking and acting, peculiarly appropriated to the Man of Laws. If he never entered upon actual practice, yet having had the profession in prospect, and frequenting the courts of law for the purpose of observing and commenting upon those modes of proceeding in which he was shortly to engage, he must have experienced some of the same effects.

It may be amusing to the fancy of a reader of Chaucer's works, to represent to himself the young poet, accoutred in the robes of a lawyer, examining a witness, fixing upon him the keenness of his eye, addressing himself with anxiety and expectation to a jury, or exercising the subtlety of his wit and judg-

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ment in the developement of one of those quirks by which a client was to be rescued from the rigour of strict and unfavouring justice. Perhaps Chaucer, in the course of his legal life, saved a thief from the gallows, and gave him a new chance of becoming a decent and useful member of society: perhaps by his penetration he discerned and demonstrated that innocence, which to a less able pleader would never have been evident, and which a less able pleader would never have succeeded in restoring triumphant to its place in the community and its fair fame. Perhaps Chaucer pleaded before Tresilian or Brember, and lived to know that those men, whose fiat had silenced his argument, or to whose inferiority of understanding, it may be, he was obliged to vail his honoured head, were led to the basest species of execution, amidst the shouts of a brutish and ignorant multitude.

Quits the profession.

We have a right however to conclude, from his having early quitted the profession, that he did not love it. The objections which might present themselves to his mind, are serious and weighty. It has an unhappy effect

upon the human understanding and temper, for a man to be compelled in his gravest investigation of an argument, to consider, not what is true, but what is convenient. The lawyer never yet existed who has not boldly urged an objection which he knew to be fallacious, or endeavoured to pass off a weak reason for a strong one. Intellect is the greatest and most sacred of all endowments; and no man ever trifled with it, defending an action to-day which he had arraigned yesterday, or extenuating an offence on one occasion, which, soon after, he painted in the most atrocious colours, with absolute impunity. Above all, the poet, whose judgment should be clear, whose feelings should be uniform and sound, whose sense should be alive to every impression and hardened to none, who is the legislator of generations and the moral instructor of the world, ought never to have been a practising lawyer, or ought speedily to have quitted so dangerous an engagement. CHAP. XVIII.

It is not to be supposed that, during the period of Chaucer's life which we are here

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considering, from 1350 to 1358, he produced no literary compositions. The activity of his genius, and the variety of his writings, render this extremely improbable.

Palamon and Arcite.

Among the works written by him in this interval may be placed his version of the story of Palamon and Arcite. To this supposition we are led by the mention of this work in the enumeration of the author's productions in the Prologue to the Legend of Good Women [q], a poem composed by him in the latter part of his life, but previously to the Canterbury Tales. He adds that, though it is true he had written such a performance, yet "the story is knowen [r] lite." It was therefore published long enough before the Legend, for the author to be sensible of the disregard and oblivion into which it had fallen.

Abridged in the Canterbury Tales.

The story of Palamon and Arcite forms at present the first division of the Canterbury Tales, under the appellation of the Knightes Tale. It may be therefore that this piece in

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[q] Ver. 420. [r] Litle.

the form in which it has come down to us, as it stands first in the series, was written previously to the rest of the collection, and published separately; being afterward incorporated into the great and concluding work of the author's life. It seems however more probable that what we possess is only an abridgment of what was once a more ample and extended work. CHAP. XVIII.

This story, as well as that of Troilus and Creseide, is among the poetical works of the celebrated Boccaccio; and is distinguished by the title of *La Teseide*. Boccaccio's poem of this name is considerably longer than his Filostrato, being divided into twelve books, and consisting of more than ten thousand lines. The Knightes Tale, which is all that we have of Chaucer on the subject, is extended to little above two thousand. Subject the same as that of Boccaccio's Teseide.

A question arises here, as in the Troilus, whether Chaucer drew his materials from the poem of Boccaccio. Mr. Tyrwhit[a] and

[a] Introductory Discourse, § 9. Essay, note 62.

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Mr. Warton[t] have expressed themselves on the point without the smallest doubt. We have however no sufficient ground for any certainty of inference. In the abridgment we possess, Chaucer does not name his author, as in his more copious production of Troilus. On the other hand Boccaccio affirms that his poem was taken from a Latin original[u]; so that many of the arguments which presented themselves in the preceding instance will apply in this, though with diminished force. The Teseide of Boccaccio is of an older date than the Filostrato, while Chaucer's version of the story of the former was in all probability made subsequently to his version of the latter; thus allowing a greater length of time for Boccaccio's reputation to propagate itself. Add to which, we have no reason to believe that the Palamon and Arcite, like the Troilus, was ever longer in the English version, than the original from which it has been supposed to be taken.

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[t] Vol. I. Sect. xii. [u] La Teseide, Lettera alla Fiammetta.

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Full of incident and variety.

'The Palamon and Arcite is a fiction much more to the taste of the present age, perhaps of every age from the revival of learning under Leo X, than the Troilus. Dryden has pronounced of it[u], that it "is of the Epique kind, and perhaps not much inferior to the Ilias or the Æneis; the story is more pleasing than either of them, the manners as perfect, the diction as poetical, the learning as deep and various, and the disposition full as artful; only it includes a greater length of time, as taking up seven years at least."

This eulogium must be acknowledged to be written in a spirit of ridiculous and impertinent exaggeration. To speak temperately however, the story of Palamon and Arcite is full of novelty and surprise, is every where alive, comprises the most interesting turns of fortune, exhibits the most powerful portrait of chivalry that was perhaps ever delineated, and possesses every thing in splendour and in action that can most conspicuously paint out

[u] Preface to his Fables.

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the scenes of the narrative to the eye of the reader. In all these respects it is strikingly contrasted with the naked and desolate simplicity of the Troilus, at the same time that it certainly does not fall short in delicacy of sentiment, the principal beauty which the Troilus has to boast.

Its unprosperous fate.

Yet see the capriciousness and uncertainty of fame, particularly at this period, when the power of truly appreciating a poet's merit existed in so few individuals! While the Troilus came down from age to age, the theme of universal admiration, and, as a French critic has expressed himself in a similar case*, surrounded with a triumphal convoy of adulators and devotees, the Palamon and Arcite, as Chaucer has informed us, near forty years after its publication was "knowen lite." The poet, in sober confidence that his work, in its most essential particulars, was worthy of public notice, recast it in the front of his Canterbury Tales, and reduced it from

* Le Grand, Preface, speaking of the *Roman de la Rose.*

about ten thousand lines, which is the length of Boccaccio's poem, to little more than two thousand. The consequence has been, that Chaucer's original work is lost, and, unhonoured, consigned to oblivion; nor has one distinction been paid it except in its compressed state, in which form it has furnished materials to the play of The Two Noble Kinsmen in the works of Beaumont and Fletcher, where the play is, though without probability, said to have been the joint composition of Fletcher and Shakespear; and in which form it became the original of the first and longest piece in the volume entitled Dryden's Fables, which is pronounced by Warton to be "the most animated and harmonious piece of versification in the English language[x]."

Compared with the Teseide.

The improvements which Chaucer has made upon Boccaccio, or upon the author from whom Boccaccio translated his Teseide, have been pointed out by Mr. Tyrwhit[y].

[x] Vol. I. Sect. xii.

[y] Introductory Discourse, § 9.

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They are such as strongly mark the delicacy, perspicacity and power of our poet's mind. He has been careful to contrast the characters of his two principal personages, and to throw the weight of interest and partiality in the reader's mind into the scale of the successful lover. Palamon and Arcite, two noble kinsmen, being made prisoners of war by Theseus king of Athens at the siege of Thebes, are by their rigorous conqueror, shut up in a high tower, whence they behold, and at the same moment conceive a hopeless love for, Emilia, the sister of their conqueror's consort. Arcite is released at the intercession of Pirithous, and ordered on pain of death to quit the victor's territories; Palamon remains for years a prisoner, but sees his mistress occasionally through the bars of his chamber-window. Arcite however returns in disguise, and becomes the gardener of the palace, thereby gaining an opportunity for his love more gratifying than that of Palamon. At length, Palamon having broken prison, the lovers casually meet, and defy each other to mortal combat. Their rigid conqueror passes by

during their engagement, discovers who they are, and condemns them to death; but is in the sequel induced to change this sentence into an appointment for a more solemn encounter. In this Arcite is victorious, but dies of an accidental hurt; while Palamon, with the consent of his rival, becomes the husband of her for the possession of whom they contended. CHAP. XVIII.

Such is the common outline of both poems: but in Boccaccio Arcite is the first to obtain sight of Emilia from the prison-window, while in Chaucer the precedence in this respect falls to Palamon. In Boccaccio the knights are for some time enamoured of the same object without jealousy or contention; but Chaucer represents them as immediately from entire friends breaking into implacable animosity. He has also, as has been already observed, always kept their characters distinct, which Boccaccio has not done; the Palamon of Chaucer being uniformly the more sedate and dignified personage, while Arcite is comparatively furious, headlong, and incapable of reason.

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Lydgate, in his enumeration of Chaucer's works says that he translated Dante.

Chaucer said to have translated Dante.

He wrote also ful many day agone
Daunt in English, him self so doth expresse[z].

But little stress is to be laid upon this authority. No mention is to be found of any such production of Chaucer, on any other occasion, or by any other author; and, if Chaucer had actually put into English this voluminous poet, or more of him than a few slight passages (a sketch of the story of Ugolino of Pisa occurs in the Monkes Tale), it is very improbable that so large a work of so popular an author as Chaucer, should be wholly lost and forgotten. Lydgate expresses himself on the subject in such a manner as greatly to subtract from his authority. "Ful many day agone" is a phrase of some scepticism: and, when he adds "him self so doth expresse," he clearly insinuates that he

[z] Fall of Princes, Prologue, stanza 44.

had neither seen the translation, nor knew any one who had; at the same time that we know that Chaucer does not, in any of his works which have come down to us, "expresse" any such thing. CHAP. XVIII.

It was probably about this period of Chaucer's life, that he wrote the translation contained in his works, of the treatise of Boethius entitled *Consolatio Philosophiæ*. This book was eminently popular in the middle ages, as exhibiting in some degree the union of Christian faith with classical refinement, and of Grecian philosophy with that spirit of allegory so congenial to the preferences of a rude and semi-barbarous people. It would be a long and laborious task to enumerate the various translations which were early made of this work of the Roman senator into almost every European language. Among the examples which might be given, it deserves to be remembered that this task fixed the choice and employed the vigils of our illustrious Alfred. Translation of Boethius.

The translation of Chaucer is not entitled to any very emphatical panegyric. The work Its defects.

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of Boethius is composed of alternate effusions in prose and verse; and his poetry, in point of ease, elegance and energy, often has a claim upon us for great commendation. But Chaucer, whose vocation to the art of verse was so early and decisive, has, for a reason which it would be difficult to discover, attired all the lofty and impressive sallies of his original in the plain and ordinary garb of prose.

Nor has he been eminently successful in preserving the sense of the Roman. Thus in the commencement of the work Boethius says,

Ecce mihi laceræ dictant scribenda Camenæ!

in the word *laceræ* plainly referring to the practice of the ancients, of expressing grief by tearing their garments; and representing his celestial visitants as thus participating in his calamity. This Chaucer translates, "For lo! *rending* Muses of Poetes enditen to me thinges to be writen." Further in the same introduction,

Protrahit ingratas impia vita moras

is rendered, "myne unpitous life draweth along ungreable *dwellynges*." Here, if we should affirm that Chaucer himself unquestionably understood the last word of the line, we must at least admit that his version would never convey the true sense to a mere English reader, and that the word "*dwellynges*" must be interpreted by such a person, not as a denomination of time, which is its meaning in Boethius, but as a denomination of place, and referring to the prison in which the illustrious senator was newly immured. It would be idle further to multiply instances. Through the whole performance Chaucer seems to have aimed too much at a literal rendering of his author, and not sufficiently to have enquired what ideas the English phrases he used would convey to an ordinary reader. CHAP. XVIII.

Judging from internal evidence, we should undoubtedly be inclined to consider this production simply as the exercise of a young man for his improvement in the art of composition. In this point of view Chaucer was well employed upon it. An author who had Its beauties.

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conceived the sublime and audacious purpose of creating a language, or (to state his enterprise in the lowest terms) of bringing a language from the hovels of the brutish and the enslaved, to which it had been banished, and of teaching it to erect its lofty front in the dwellings of princes and the halls of the learned, did wisely when he set himself diligently to consider how a Roman senator, the ornament of a mighty empire, would have expressed his thoughts in the words and phrases of this dishonoured tongue. Accordingly many passages of Chaucer's translation are beautifully idiomatic and harmonious in their construction. Take for example the commencement of his version of that celebrated metre [a],

O qui perpetua mundum ratione gubernas, &c.

" O thou father, soveraine and creatour of heven and of erthes, that governest this world by perdurable reson, that commandest

[a] Lib. III, Metrum ix.

the tymes to gone sythe that age had beginning: thou that dwellest thy selfe aye stedfaste and stable, and yevest all other thinges to be meved: ne foraine causes ne causeden the never to compoune werk of [b] flitering matere, but onely the forme of soverain gode yset within the without envy, that meved the frely; thou that art [c] alderfairest, beringe the fayre world in thy thought formedest this worlde to thy [the] likenesse semblable of that fayre world in thy thought."

Chaucer values himself upon it.

There are reasons however which may induce us to believe that Chaucer regarded his translation of Boethius in a different light than as an exercise to be performed for his private improvement. He, as well as Lydgate, mentions it with apparent complacence in the general enumeration of his works [d]. Beside which, we are to consider that, in the first attempts to form and refine a language, translation was not, as now, regarded

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[b] moving, agitated, unquiet.

[c] most fairest, *double superlative.*

[d] Legend of Good Women, ver. 425.

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as the province of inferior talents; but that on the contrary, the highest geniuses and great masters of intellect regarded themselves as well and nobly employed in the task, and believed that the proper foundation for a superstructure of letters in any language, was to naturalise and make free of that language, the venerable fathers of letters in remote ages and distant countries.

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CHAUCER ENTERS INTO THE SERVICE OF EDWARD III.—MOTIVES OF HIS PREFERMENT.—RESIDES NEAR THE PALACE AT WOODSTOCK.—CHARACTER OF THE ENGLISH COURT IN THE YEAR 1358.—BATTLE OF POITIERS.

HITHERTO Chaucer has appeared only as a private individual, and the anecdotes of his life are scanty. We are left to reasoning and inference, as to the places of his education, and the functions to which he was destined. We are now to see him in a different light. From the thirtieth year of his age, if not sooner, to his death, he was a courtier, the counsellor of princes, employed in various negociations and embassies, and involved in the factions, contentions and intrigues of his time.

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Those persons seem to have considered the question very superficially, who have been willing to seek in some other principle than in his literature, for the cause of the attention which Chaucer experienced in the family of his sovereign. He was employed in various negociations. In like manner, Prior was a negociator, and Addison was a minister; yet they were indebted for their political fortune to their literary performances.

Respect paid to genius and literature in the early ages of Europe.

But the times of Prior and Addison will afford a very faint image of the attention with which literature was treated in the courts of princes at the period we are considering. In later ages literature has been so diffused as to lose its rareness; and it is well known that rareness is the great recommender of every object among the wealthy and luxurious. A munificent prince in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, might open his hand, and become the patron of almost every scholar and man of genius throughout his dominions. Now talents are left to thrive as they can, and be the builders of

their own fortune. This is in the order of nature; and there are many reasons why we ought not to regret it. CHAP. XIX. 1358.

In the early times to which we have had repeated occasion to refer, princes often considered the superintendence of letters as one of the great functions of their office. We have seen Henry II. dictating to Wace and Benoit the subjects of their compositions. Richard I. is well known to have lived in perpetual intercourse with the poets of his time. Edward I. brought over to England by his patronage Raymond Lully [a], and Guido dalla Colonna the author of the original Troy Book [b]. Alphonsus X, king of Castille, surnamed the Wise, was the author of several important astronomical discoveries; and Robert king of Naples declared that, if he must part with his studies or his crown, he should not hesitate in withdrawing himself Miscellaneous examples.

[a] Olaus Borrichius, Conspectus Scriptorum Chemicorum, cap. 24; apud Mangetus, Bibliotheca Chemica.

[b] G. J. Vossius De Historicis Latinis, Lib. II, Cap. lx. Mongitore, Bibliotheca Sicula, art. Guido de Columpnis.

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to private life [c]. Even Richard II, weak, indolent and dissipated as he was, aped the spirit of the times, sent for Gower to his barge, and enjoined him to book some new thing. These are only a few of many examples which might be cited.

Examples of Petrarca and Boccaccio.

But the spirit of patronage, and the distinctions bestowed upon men of letters, gradually increased, and never rose to a higher pitch than in the time of Chaucer. Every page of the history of Petrarca and Boccaccio, his contemporaries, is an illustration of this truth. They were both of plebeian birth, and Boccaccio the offspring of illicit love, a circumstance upon which it was the mode of those times to lay the greatest stress. Yet, owing to their literary accomplishments only, they are among the most important personages in the contemporary history of the Italian states. Petrarca in particular was during life courted by cardinals and popes; those among them who did not love, affected to honour him;

[c] De Sade, Tom. I, p. 446.

he corresponded with princes and sovereign states, and on all great occasions without hesitation wrote them his advice; and he was offered the laurel at the same instant from Paris and Rome, the two greatest cities of the western world. CHAP. XIX. 1358.

Literary character of Edward III.

We might easily conclude, even if we had not materials enough of direct evidence to confirm the fact, that Edward III, who was smitten with a deep passion for every thing which was construed by his contemporaries as glorious and honourable, did not fail to catch the tone of the neighbouring princes and states, in their forwardness to patronise men of literary genius. He had received a learned education, and numbers two of the greatest scholars of his time among his tutors. These were Richard Bury [d] and Walter Burley [e]. Richard Bury was an assiduous col-

Richard Bury.

[d] Godwin, De Præsulibus Angliæ: Episcopi Dunelmenses, cap. xxii.

[e] Wharton, Appendix to Cave, Hist. Lit. art. Burlæus. Barnes, Book I, Chap. iii, §. 5. Plot, History of Oxfordshire.

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lector of books, and a valued friend of Petrarca; they being the most distinguished and active persons of their age, in recovering and restoring the almost lost works of many of the Latin classics[f]. He was successively keeper of the privy seal, lord treasurer, lord chancellor of the realm, and bishop of Durham; and died in the year 1345[g]. Walter Burley was one of the most considerable schoolmen of the age[h]: and we may form some conjecture respecting his abilities, as well as the importance attached to his person, from the circumstance of his three nephews appearing among the most distinguished and accomplished courtiers of Richard II.

Walter Burley.

Popularity of Chaucer previously to the year 1358.

If we have sufficient reason to believe that Chaucer was in some degree obscure by his birth and original situation, we have arguments not less strong to persuade us that his fame as a poet was already established, pre-

[f] Wharton, Barnes, and Plot, ubi supra.

[g] Godwin, ubi supra.

[h] De Sade, Tom. I, p. 168.

viously to the time at which he entered the family of his sovereign. Gower was so well known as a poet, that, as we have seen, Richard II. considered it as a stroke of policy to affect to patronise and encourage him. But Gower never equalled, in the sentiment of his contemporaries or succeeding ages, the eminence of Chaucer. Chaucer had already written his Troilus and Creseide; a poem immeasurably superior to any thing then existing in the English language, which (in an age that, wherever letters were loved, loved them so ardently) could not, and we know in fact did not, pass without rapturous admiration; in fine, a poem, according to the remark of Lydgate,

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Whiche for to reden lovers them del ite,
Thei have therin so grete devocioun[1],

a remark in the most pointed manner expressive of its great and general popularity.

Another obvious argument may be added

Court poems of Chaucer.

[1] Fall of Princes, Prologue, stanza 42.

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to prove that it was to his poetical talent that Chaucer owed his rise at court. A man naturally prosecutes that species of employment, to which he has already been indebted for the most substantial advantage. Now Chaucer continued through life to cultivate the art of poetry. It may be said indeed that men have sometimes received from nature so strong a vocation to a particular pursuit, that no consideration can root the passion for it out of their minds. Was this the case with Chaucer? Did he indulge his vein secretly? No: he wrote upon the courtship of John of Gaunt, upon the marriage of that nobleman, upon the death of the duchess of Lancaster, subjects which show that he did not design that his productions should be concealed from his protectors, but which on the contrary may convince any reasonable enquirer, that he had already profited by his poetical vein, and expected still further to gratify his superiors by giving scope to it.

Placed by Edward near the person of his minor son.

Chaucer was during the greater part of his life devoted to the service of John of Gaunt; and, from this circumstance, many persons

have been inclined to take the merit of first patronising him from the king, and give it to this celebrated prince. But, before we assent to this supposition, it may be worth our while to yield a little attention to a comparison of dates. The remotest of Chaucer's compositions written in the service of the court, the date of which can be traced, seems to have been the fruit of the early part of 1358, the year preceding the marriage of John of Gaunt with the heiress of Lancaster. Nor does it appear to be the production of an inexperienced courtier, but rather of one who had been for some time familiarised with the scenes of royalty. Now John of Gaunt was born in the year 1340, and was therefore at the period of this composition only eighteen years of age. What probability is there that, previously to, or even at that period, this young prince possessed the discernment, the fortitude and the dignity, to have formed the plan of raising his character by literary patronage, and to have looked through the kingdom with such accuracy as to have discovered the man in it most entitled

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to his encouragement? Is it not infinitely more likely that his father, a prince of acknowledged abilities and of various ambition, should have conceived the project of attaching to a favourite son a man of eminent literary endowments, to form his mind, and adorn his establishment?

Similar situation of Gower.

There is a further circumstance which strongly tends to confirm this supposition. The two great contemporary poets of this island were Chaucer and Gower: and they considerably resembled each other in their fortunes; for while Chaucer was during life attached to the person and interests of John of Gaunt duke of Lancaster, Gower was not less intimately and permanently connected with Thomas of Woodstock duke of Gloucester, the fifth and youngest son of Edward III[k]. This is a coincidence too striking to be the effect of accident. It is reasonable to impute the two events to one cause. And what cause can be more probable, than that

[k] See Chap. XVII.

the father of both these princes employed a similar measure for the improvement and advantage of each? Edmund of Langley duke of York, the fourth son of Edward III, was a prince of little capacity, and therefore his father might not think of applying the same measures in his case. CHAP. XIX. 1358.

These remarks perhaps constitute a sufficient answer to the invidious observations of Mr. Tyrwhit, who infers from Chaucer having been appointed by Edward III, sixteen years after, to the situation of comptroller of the customs on wool in the port of London, and from a phrase in the patent of his appointment, requiring Chaucer to "write the accounts of his office with his own hand[1]," that the king "was either totally insensible of our author's poetical talents, or at least had no mind to encourage him in the cultivation or exercise of them." He then adds something Patent of 1374 considered.

[1] I have examined a great number of the patent grants of this office, among the rolls in the Tower, both of a previous and subsequent date to that of Chaucer, and find this or an equivalent phrase occurring in every one of them.

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of "the petrifying quality, with which these custom-house accounts might be expected to operate upon Chaucer's genius;" and sagaciously concludes, "It should seem that Edward, though adorned with many royal and heroic virtues, had not the gift of discerning and patronising a great poet; a gift, which, like that of genuine poetry, is only bestowed on the chosen few by the peculiar favour of heaven [m]."

In discussing this question it has not been sufficiently considered that, however copious the ability of princes for rewarding merit may appear to the ordinary rate of spectators, it is seldom so felt by themselves. The most obvious method which presents itself, is that of conferring an office; and in such cases the thought rarely occurs of suiting the office to the man, but the man is expected to adapt himself as he can, to the office. Add to which, that, though the business of public offices is apt enough to be ill done, it is not

[m] Preface, Appendix C, note e.

done exactly as satirists and censurers have frequently represented: and the man who receives the emoluments of a place, is for the greater part expected to pay some attention to its duties. Among many illustrations which might be given of these particulars, the case of Prior is exactly in point. Though we are certain that the benefits conferred upon him were the result of his poetical talent, yet one of the first he received was the being made a commissioner of the customs, and he[n], like Chaucer[o], complained of the discouragement and drudgery of its functions. In like manner, two dramatic poets of our own day (Richard Cumberland and Arthur Murphy) have been rewarded, one by being made secretary to the board of trade, and the other a commissioner of bankrupts.

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There is a still further circumstance which tends more decisively to exhibit to us Edward III. as the patron and personal friend

Chaucer resides at Woodstock.

[n] Swift's Works, Journal to Stella, Mar. 13, 1712.

[o] House of Fame, Book II, ver. 144.

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of Chaucer. Chaucer spent the greater part of his life at Woodstock. Who placed him there? Who was it that inhabited the Palace of Woodstock? Edward III. John of Gaunt might have lived at Woodstock Palace during his nonage; but we do not find that he had any residence which belonged to himself, in that part of the island. We see therefore that Edward III, or his queen (for it is reasonable to suppose that it was one of them, who thus fixed for Chaucer the place of his abode), was not content to be merely the patron of Chaucer, but resolved to have him for a neighbour and a guest.

Chaucer had a house at Woodstock at least as early as in the year 1359. This may be confidently presumed from the description of his residence, in the poem entitled his Dream, written on occasion of the marriage of John of Gaunt with the heiress of Lancaster, which was celebrated on the nineteenth of May in that year. The dream which is the subject of this poem passed, according to the statement of Chaucer,

in his thoughtés, as he lay
Within a lodge out of the way,
Beside a well in a forest.

ver. 17.

This description sufficiently answers to the geography of Woodstock Park; in which are contained a spring of water, called Rosamond's Well from the celebrated Rosamond Clifford, mistress to Henry II; and another (not far from the house still denominated in the deeds and legal instruments in which it is described, Chaucer's House), called Queen's Pool in memory of Philippa queen to Edward III. Chaucer's House adjoins to what is now the principal entrance of Woodstock Park, and therefore aptly corresponds to the term "lodge," which has been usually appropriated to any small dwelling appended to a more spacious one, and situate on the verge of a park, or other similar inclosure.

In like manner in the Parliament of Birds, a poem written in 1358, Chaucer lays the scene in

——a parke ywalled with grene stone;

ver. 122.

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words which occur again in his Complaint of the Black Knight [p], and which have generally been explained by his commentators as referring to Woodstock Park [q], the first inclosure of that kind made in England.

His habitation described.

Chaucer has further gratified us in the course of this poem [the Dream] with a description of the chamber in which he slept, which suggests to us ideas of competence and ease, sufficiently confirmed by the remaining vestiges of his habitation; where the chief thing discoverable is the wall inclosing a spacious apartment, said by the persons now residing in the vicinity to have been his chapel. He tells us that he slept

> in a chamber paint
> Ful of stories old and divers,
> More than I can as now reherse.
>
> ver. 1320.

And presently after,

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[p] ver. 42.

[q] Urry's Chaucer, Life, sig. b.

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But when I woke all was [r]ysest;
For there n'as lady ne creture,
Save on the wals old portraiture
Of horsmen, haukés, and of houndes,
And of hurt dere al full of woundes,
Some like bitten, some hurt with shot.
ver. 2166.

This description is further amplified in the Book of the Duchess, written ten years after, where Chaucer declares that

his chamber was
Ful wel depainted, and with glas
Were al the windowes wel yglased,
Ful clere, and not a hole [s]ycrased,
That to beholde it was grete joy;
For wholly al the storie of Troy
Was in the glaising ywrought thus;
Of Hector and kinge Priamus,
Achilles and kinge Lamedon,
And eke Medea and Jason,
Of Paris, Heleine and Lavine:
And al the walles with colours fine

[r] ceased, vanished. [s] broken.

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Were painted, both the texte and [1] glose,
And al the Romaunt of the Rose.
ver. 321.

The description here quoted is given indeed in a manner not altogether unequivocal, as it represents the chamber such as Chaucer saw it in a dream. If we are to regard it as a genuine delineation, we may then suppose the "old portraiture" of hawking and hunting described by him in 1359, to have been the ornament of the apartment, placed there by some former tenant; and the painted windows with the story of Troy, and the walls adorned with scenes from the Romance of the Rose, to have been an improvement introduced by Chaucer, instead of the antiquated figures he found in his apartment.

On every interpretation however we find Chaucer placed considerably at his ease, so early as when he was about thirty years of age. He was the servant of his sovereign;

[1] gloss, comment, key,

and he had not, like many servants, merely apartments assigned him in the palace, but was domiciliated in a convenient and moderately spacious house, which he could call his own, and which was no doubt the gift of the royal bounty. CHAP. XIX. 1358.

How he was subsisted during this period we are not informed. There is no record of his having received any gratuity from the crown, earlier than the twentieth of June 1367. It is not impossible, as he was the son of a merchant, and probably the only son (for we do not find in any of his writings, though he often speaks of himself, the least trace of his having relations), and as he was born in a situation which entailed upon him all the privileges of a citizen of London, that he received a paternal inheritance adequate to the purposes of existence. We shall see still stronger reasons hereafter to believe that Chaucer was by no means unprovided with the advantages of competence. It is not improbable that he discharged, regularly or occasionally, the functions of secretary to the king or queen, or was employed in draw- Inferences.

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ing up some of the state-papers of his time. Edward III, in the patent of Chaucer's annuity above-mentioned, assigns as a reason of the grant "the services he had performed to the crown[u];" and we know that his residence, at least at Woodstock, was such, that he might at any time be summoned in a very few minutes into the presence of the sovereign, if occasion should require it. The subsequent intimacy and friendship, which will be seen to have constantly subsisted between him and John of Gaunt, may also reasonably lead us to conjecture, that the intercourse, during the tender years of this prince, was considerable, and that Chaucer had no mean share in the preceptorial cares and vigilance which were employed to excite and guide his infant mind.

Literary character of the Plantagenets.

So much as is here stated, was undoubtedly due to the characters of Chaucer and his sovereign, and to the illustration of the spirit of the times. We amuse ourselves with de-

[u] Appendix, No. V.

nominating the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries illiterate: and in a certain sense no doubt they were illiterate. Literature had by no means extended its benign influence to the lower classes of the community. Even among persons who occasionally arrived at the highest stations, we find some who were totally destitute of letters. It is related of the celebrated Bertrand du Guesclin, constable of France, that he could neither write nor read [r]. But princes, and persons of eminent and illustrious birth, were accustomed to receive a liberal education. That age could not be wholly illiterate, in which Oxford could boast of thirty thousand scholars, and in which the students of the university of Paris shared the metropolis equally with the citizens [s].

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With respect to the distinctions bestowed upon learned men in the fourteenth century,

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[r] Collection Universelle des Memoires Particuliers relatifs à l'Histoire de France: Memoires de Du Guesclin.

[s] See Chap. X, p. 189.

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and in our own times, we must on no account presume to contend with them. Thomas Aquinas, and the other great leaders among the schoolmen, fixed upon themselves the attention of the world. Petrarca and Boccaccio not only appear to us now the most eminent men of their age, but were seen in the same point of view by their contemporaries. They were crowned by sovereign states, courted by princes, and their advices and admonitions received with universal and undissembled deference.

As to our princes of the Plantagenet race, whatever vices we may impute to them, and whatever calamities may be traced to their system of policy, they may challenge a comparison with any dynasty in the history of the world, in the patronage of poets and learned men. We have seen what were the merits, under this head, of Henry II, Richard I, and Edward I. Even our weaker princes, Henry III [x]. and Richard II [x], if they were

[x] See Chap. IX.

not distinguished for their patronage of letters, were yet munificent in their encouragement of the arts, and in that way contributed to the refinement and progress of the human race. We have now restored Edward III. to his just reputation in this particular, and shown him as the declared and habitual patron of the two great English poets of his time, Chaucer and Gower. We find him fixing Chaucer immediately under his eye, and, by rational inference, desiring to relieve the cares of empire by his conversation, to listen to his remarks, to have his hours of relaxation enlivened by the sallies of the poet, and probably to be the first hearer of his productions. It was not till the unhappy contention of the rival houses of York and Lancaster, equally hostile to the favourable influences both of letters and of humanity, that the court of London ceased to be, in the measure which could reasonably be expected, the abode of the muses.

Character of the English court.

Chaucer being at this time unequivocally a member of the English court, it becomes an indispensible part of a work professing to

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exhibit an ample view of his life, of the scenes through which he passed, and of the objects which affected and moulded his mind, to take a survey of that court as it appeared in the year 1358.

of Edward III.

Edward III. king of England was born in the year 1312. His father was a prince singularly weak in capacity; and as his mother was a woman of a daring temper and abandoned morals, these circumstances led to a tragical termination of her husband's reign, when the young prince was only fourteen years of age. He did not however long remain subjected to the bold and shameless administration which at first assumed the reins of government: he had able advisers; and the haughty and independent spirit of the English baronage was not fitted to suffer patiently so disgraceful an usurpation. Accordingly, four years after, the prince put himself at the head of a confederacy, which surprised the queen in the palace, brought her paramour to the gallows, and shut up herself in imprisonment for life.

At about the age of fifteen Edward III.

married Philippa of Hainault, a princess possessing every accomplishment the age had to bestow, an admirer of learned men, courteous, affable, prudent, discerning, humane and heroic. The historians and writers of the age vie with each other in her praise; the topic appears in their hands fruitful and inexhaustible; and they are even suspected of having invented some anecdotes, that they might the better have an opportunity to praise her who was worthy of all commendation. Allied with such a woman, and at so early an age, it is difficult to say how much the monarch might be indebted to her monitions and society, for those qualities which have given him such a lustre with succeeding times.

Philippa added to every domestic quality which could adorn her rank, the accomplishments of a heroine and a warrior. The prejudices of chivalry were calculated in many respects to produce an auspicious effect upon women of high birth and station. As it was the custom to adore them, they were strongly stimulated to acquire those merits

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which might do them credit in the eyes of their worshippers. Chivalry, as has already been observed, while under one aspect it inspired confidence and pride, under another laid the utmost stress upon modesty, deference, and a disposition to serve and assist the worthy. Thus, women of quality, whom at one moment we see treated by the votaries of knighthood as beings of a superior nature, at another are presented to us unarming the heroes, performing for them all the offices of hospitality, and ambitiously rendering them even menial services. Liberality of sentiment was the necessary attendant upon this system of conduct. A woman of rank and understanding in these times was proud, but her pride tended only to render her condescension more graceful; and the two qualities united, gave her eloquence, and ease, and every winning and beautiful attraction. Every consideration inspired them with honour and admiration of the true followers of knighthood, and, as they prided themselves in their fathers and their husbands, they were anxious that their sons should become in like

manner what they deemed models of excellence [y]. CHAP. XIX.

It was impossible that their thoughts should be thus perpetually conversant with war and arms, without inspiring in their own breasts some of the sentiments of a warrior. They never became coarse and masculine; they never engaged in those sports and exercises which were the images of war; for no system was ever so successful as that of chivalry in assigning to each sex its respective department. But they were conscious of their worth; they spontaneously shrunk from pusillanimity and weakness; and were consequently capable of great and heroic effort, when a great emergency called for it. This is illustrated to us by many incidents of history, contemporary with Edward III. The countess of Salisbury, to whom we are probably indebted for the distinguishing symbol which marks the order of the Garter [z], and 1358.

[y] Ste. Palaye, Memoires sur la Chevalerie, Partie I.

[z] Collins, Peerage of England: duke of Manchester. Hume, Chap. XVI.

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who, I hope, was not in a gross sense the mistress of Edward III, since she was the wife of the most zealous and faithful of his servants, but who was certainly according to the modes and refinements of chivalry his ostensible mistress, is recorded for her gallant defence of the castle of Werk against the Scots in the year 1341[a]. The preservation of the province of Britanny by Jane de Montfort, from the arms of a competitor who had already made her husband a prisoner in 1342, is one of the most celebrated military exploits of that warlike age[b]. After several campaigns she was at length so successful as to reduce this competitor, Charles de Blois, to a similar state of captivity, and by that event seemed to have terminated the contest; when the wife of Charles de Blois, by whom he acquired his pretensions upon Britanny, took up his declining cause, and shewed herself no less accomplished in the defence of her here-

[a] Froissart, Vol. I, Chap. lxxvii.

[b] Ditto, Chap. lxxxi, &c.

ditary possessions than the countess de Montfort had proved when in like manner oppressed by fortune [c]. CHAP. XIX. 1358.

The name of queen Philippa is enrolled in this catalogue of heroines. When her husband was absent in the campaign of Cressy, king David Bruce, the strict ally of the French, thought this a fit opportunity for the invasion of the English dominions. Philippa however was by no means dismayed at the attack, at a moment when Edward III. with the flower of his military followers was in France. She collected an army in the best manner she was able; she gave the command to the bravest and most accomplished captain in her court; and herself accompanied her forces in their march. When they arrived in sight of the enemy, at Neville's Cross near Durham, she rode through the ranks, and exhorted every man to do his duty in repelling these ravagers of their native soil: nor could she be persuaded to leave the field,

[c] A. D. 1347. Froissart, Vol. I. Chap. cxliii.

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till the two armies were on the point of engaging. The English army was only twelve thousand strong, while the Scots amounted to fifty thousand. But, animated by the undaunted behaviour of their mistress, they won the day, and made the Scottish sovereign their prisoner[d]. Having finished the campaign, Philippa sailed over to France, to embrace her husband, victorious from the field of Cressy, who was now engaged in the siege of Calais; and she is here represented by the contemporary historian[e], as having exerted her humanity, and the magnanimity of her disposition, for the preservation of Eustace de St. Pierre and the other five burgesses who had offered themselves as the voluntary victims of the sternness and resentment of her husband.

Edward III. compared with William I. and Edward I.

Edward III. was rather a brilliant, than a great prince. The early English sovereigns of the Norman and Plantagenet race were,

[d] Froissart, Vol. I, Chap. cxxxvii, cxxxviii, cxxxix.

[e] Ditto, Chap. cxlvi.

most of them, distinguished for greater ability than is ordinarily to be found on a throne. But among them it is easy to separate the shining from the wise. William the Conqueror and Edward I. are the geniuses of the English story. Unhappily they were both unamiable men. But they were great legislators. William first bestowed a solid establishment upon the feudal system in England; and he gave a compact and substantial form to it, beyond what it ever attained in any other nation. He conceived an object, and he pursued it with unremitted, unrelenting constancy. He created a country; he made the Saxons peasants, and the Normans lords; and he established a certain portion of civilisation and arts in the island. Edward I. was also a legislator; he studied the systems and the principles of legislation. His measures with regard to Wales, where he succeeded, and Scotland, where he failed, were those of a man of profound sagacity and comprehensive views.

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In opposition to William the Conqueror and Edward I, the geniuses of our story, we

with Henry II.

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may place Henry II. and Edward III, who are its brilliant characters, and upon whom for that reason much louder eulogiums have been lavished than upon the two former. Henry II. was a very accomplished prince; liberal, learned and humane, after the mode of the times in which he lived. But all his measures were false. His conquest of Ireland was productive of no benefit, either to himself, or to the nation he ought to have civilised. His indulgence to his sons was of the worst sort, calamitous to himself, and fatal to them. But the great scene of his reign best exhibits the defects of his character; his contention with Thomas of Becket. It was a contest of passion, and not of reason, presenting itself to the monarch's mind as a deep stroke of policy, and duping him into the most disgraceful consequences. It was entered upon a day too soon; the papal power trembled under its own weight, but it was not ripe to fall: and Henry with the least penetration might have seen that he was not strong enough to combat it. What he was so anxious to effect, must necessarily happen

a short time after, and was therefore not worth his expence of happiness and honour. CHAP. XIX. 1358.

Edward III. was, still more than Henry, a character of mere exterior brilliancy. He entered into no profound measures of policy; and the best laws of his reign were carried in opposition to the court. He attempted the conquest of France; and he might as reasonably have attempted the conquest of the empire of Gengiskhan. The whole French nation felt the profoundest abhorrence of the yoke he desired to impose upon them. But what he obtained extended as far as the powers of his mind enabled him to look: he gained a few brilliant victories, and a name in arms. He was also a man of a gallant and generous nature; and the occasional display of that nature in his transactions, renders his reign a fascinating object of contemplation.

Edward III. and Henry II, as they resembled each other in many of the leading features of their minds, so they were also alike in their end. Theirs were the virtues and

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accomplishments of young men; and, as they advanced in age, a deep gloom of unprosperous circumstances overshadowed their declining years. Henry lost many of his provinces in France, and became a prey to the base and unnatural hostilities of his sons. Edward was more fortunate in his sons; but he was stripped of all those acquisitions which had been the basis of his youthful glory, and, even in his domestic government, sunk in the latter years of his life into a cypher.

Lustre of the reign of Edward III.

But, whatever were the personal merits of Edward, his reign was illustrious. It is not unworthy our consideration to reflect for a moment what is and what is not to be understood by this term, illustrious. As it is ordinarily employed, it implies nothing eminently sound in moral principle, nor directly and obviously tending to the increase of human happiness. Certainly the French wars of Edward III. were not entitled to either of these commendations. They were in the highest degree unjustifiable in the commence-

ment, and they were the active and generating cause of infinite misery. But if the term illustrious, in its ordinary acceptation, is often rated too high, persons impressed with a sense of this abuse, have on the other hand not unfrequently been inclined to rate it too low. The victories of Cressy and Poitiers, with all their vices and miserable consequences, had no doubt some good effects upon the English nation. The nation (understanding by the term the coalesced mass of Saxons and Normans) about this time began to exist. We were astonished at our own prowess and success. We learned to respect ourselves. Self-reverence is one of the most powerful incentives to virtue, and one of the strongest stimulants to glorious enterprise. If the English have excelled every other modern nation in justness of feeling, in integrity of conduct, in the cultivation of domestic and honourable sentiment, in depth of science, and ardour of poetical imagination, the victories of Cressy and Poitiers are not unworthy to find a place among the causes which have made us what we are.

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It was, as Mr. Hume observes[f], an admirable spectacle, more glorious than all the insolent parade of a Roman triumph, which was exhibited by the Black Prince, when he received John king of France as his prisoner, and conducted him to the court of his father. No sooner was the captive monarch introduced to the tent of his conqueror, than the prince of Wales ordered a repast to be prepared for him, at which he himself served as if he had been one of the French king's retinue; he stood behind his chair during the meal, and constantly refused to take a place at the table, alleging that he was only a subject, and knew too well the distance between his rank and that of majesty, to assume such a freedom. "All his father's pretensions to the crown of France were forgotten; the misfortunes of John, and not his title, were respected; and the French prisoners, conquered by this elevation of mind more than by their late discomfiture, burst

[f] Chap. xvi.

into tears of admiration." When he passed through the streets of London, "the prisoner was clad in royal apparel, and mounted on a white steed, distinguished by its size and beauty, and by the richness of its furniture. The conqueror rode by his side in a meaner attire, and carried by a black palfrey." Edward III "advanced to meet the royal stranger, and received him with the same courtesy as if he had been a neighbouring potentate that had voluntarily come to pay him a friendly visit." CHAP. XIX. 1358.

Malignant tendency of the system he pursued.

But, glorious as these moments were, and generous and elevated as were the feelings which stamped them, and which they are calculated to inspire, they were certainly bought at infinitely too high a price. This graceful situation, this beautiful and impressive exhibition, were not purchased but with the almost entire ruin of one of the finest countries in the world. Take the picture of this ruin in the words of the historian who has placed in so enchanting a point of view the triumphs of the Black Prince. "Mean-

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while, the captivity of John, joined to the preceding disorders of the French government, had produced in that country a dissolution, almost total, of civil authority, and had occasioned confusions, the most horrible and destructive that had ever been experienced in any age or in any nation. Marcel, provost of the merchants, and first magistrate of Paris, put himself at the head of the unruly populace; and from the violence and temerity of his character, pushed them to commit the most criminal outrages against the royal authority. They detained the dauphin in a sort of captivity; they murdered in his presence Robert de Clermont and John de Conflans, mareschals, the one of Normandy, the other of Burgundy. The other cities of the kingdom, in imitation of the capital, shook off the dauphin's authority; took the government into their own hands; and spread the disorder into every province. The troops, who, from the deficiency of pay, were no longer retained in discipline, sought the means of subsistence by plunder and rob-

bery, and associating to them all the disorderly people, with whom that age abounded, formed numerous bands, which infested all parts of the kingdom. They desolated the open country; burned and plundered the villages; and by cutting off all means of communication or subsistence, reduced even the inhabitants of the walled towns to the most extreme necessity. The gentry were hunted like wild beasts, and put to the sword without mercy: Their castles were consumed with fire, and levelled to the ground: Their wives and daughters were first ravished, then murdered: The savages proceeded so far as to impale some gentlemen, and roast them alive before a slow fire. In other civil wars, the opposite factions, falling under the government of their several leaders, commonly preserve still the vestige of some rule and order: But here the wild state of nature seemed to be renewed: Every man was thrown loose and independent of his fellows: And the populousness of the country, derived from the preceding police of civil society, served only to increase the horror

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and confusion of the scene[t]." This was certainly too much to pay for the most enchanting theatrical exhibition that was ever performed: and these were the effects of the detestable pretensions set up by Edward III. to the crown of France.

Sons of Edward III.

We have already said that Edward III. was fortunate in his sons. It does not appear that he had ever a serious misunderstanding with any of them. They beheld him surrounded with the lustre which the battle of Cressy, and his gallant and honourable demeanour on that and many other occasions, had thrown upon him, and thought it the greatest honour of their lives to be the sons of such a father. Edward the Black Prince, the eldest of them, has universally been considered as the most consummate hero the school of chivalry ever bred; and he passed a glorious life of forty-six years, untarnished with the breath of a censure. Lionel of Antwerp, the king's second son,

[t] Hume, ubi supra.

was frank, generous, polite, and eminently popular: he was guileless, easy and sincere, with the understanding of a gentleman in the purest sense of that word, and the carriage which might best become a prince. John of Gaunt, Edward's third son, the patron and friend of Chaucer, was in a great degree the favourite and confident of his father. Edmund of Langley, the fourth son, was a weak prince, but of unblemished character; and Thomas of Woodstock, the youngest, a youth of great promise and splendid abilities. CHAP. XIX. 1358.

At the period at which we here take up the history of the English court, Edward III. had attained his forty-sixth year, and his queen was nearly of the same age. The Black Prince, who had already distinguished himself at the field of Cressy, won the battle of Poitiers, and taken the king of France prisoner, but who was yet a bachelor, was now twenty-eight. Lionel of Antwerp was twenty years of age, John of Gaunt eighteen, Edmund of Langley seventeen, and Thomas of Woodstock still an infant. Lionel had been contracted, as a compliment to the Irish na-

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tion, in the third year of his age to the daughter and heiress of the earl of Ulster; and, this marriage being afterward consummated, the fruit of it was an only daughter, born in the year 1355. Lionel being already in prospect, in consequence of this contract, earl of Ulster, John of Gaunt his next brother was, while yet an infant, advanced to the honours of earl of Richmond. The inheritance of the crown on the demise of the reigning sovereign, a species of presumptive futurity which has always a great effect upon the present weight and importance of the person to whom it points, was first with the Black Prince, next with Lionel, and in their failure with Lionel's infant daughter; thus cutting off the young earl of Richmond from any reasonable prospect to the diadem.

We will not here extend our view of the English court beyond the survey of the different members of the family on the throne;

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JUVENILE HISTORY OF JOHN OF GAUNT EARL OF RICHMOND.—HIS COURTSHIP WITH THE PRINCESS BLANCHE.—CHARACTER OF THE PRINCESS.

JOHN of GAUNT earl of Richmond was born on the day of February 1340[a], and raised to the title by which he is here described, 20 September 1342[b]. He was born at Ghent in Flanders, precisely at the period when his father assumed the title of king of France[c], and had come with his queen to that city, with the view of concerting mea-

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His birth.

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[a] Stow, ad ann. Compare Barnes, Book I, Chap. xiv, §. 2, 3.

[b] Sandford, Genealogical History, Book IV, Chap. i. Dugdale, Baronage, Vol. II, p. 114.

[c] Rymer, Foedera, Tom. V, 14 Edv. 3, Feb. 8.

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sures for his projected invasion. His stature was considerably above the ordinary size, his limbs were well proportioned, and he early discovered symptoms of a masculine and brave disposition. His father therefore spared no attention in cultivating his youthful mind. He designed him for a soldier, to which profession his nature, as well as the propensity of the times, seemed to guide him: and he was careful to familiarise his early years with the elements of literature, for which purpose Chaucer, with others, was placed near his person.

Plan of his education.

We know nothing specifically of the education of the young earl; but the mode of educating persons of rank was at this time so uniform, that we shall hazard little in supposing that his nonage was conducted according to the most approved ideas of the age in which he lived. Edward III. was, as we have seen, the professed devotee and reviver of the manners of chivalry, and we cannot doubt that he employed them with scrupulous fidelity in the education of his children.

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A young person destined to receive the honours of knighthood, was ordinarily left, till he had completed his seventh year, in the hands of the women. He then entered upon the first stage of his military probation. He received the appellation of page or valet, and was admitted into the presence of his father or superiors. The mode of education bestowed upon him was social: if he were of less opulent parentage, he was received, together with a number of others in similar circumstances, into the house of some more wealthy nobleman, and associated to his children: and, if his parents were themselves affluent, they sought for him companions of more contracted patrimony, who became the associates of his bosom, and his brothers of the war. Here the first lesson he learned was the honour of the *Preux*; or in other words, that an accomplished knight who had shown himself worthy of that high character, was the most extraordinary and admirable object that could be offered to his view. He approached such a person with wonder, affection and awe, as the chosen

Early discipline of persons of rank in the fourteenth century.

Pages.

They were brought up in companies.

were inspired with emulation.

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object of his present deference, and of his future ardent and unconquerable emulation. If such were the general feeling cultivated in these cases, we may easily imagine with what sentiments the young and high-spirited earl of Richmond gazed upon his laurelled sire, and upon the heroes of the field of Cressy, won in the seventh year of his age.

were held in active exercise.

The pages were also early taught to inure their infant limbs to such exercises, as might best fit them for the offices of a soldier.

were impressed with sentiments of modesty and reverence.

One of the favourite lessons at this time instilled into them, was, according to the technical phraseology of the times, "the love of God and the ladies." Modesty, reverence and respect were ranked among the most essential virtues of a young probationer in arms; and it is the peculiar praise of the institutions of chivalry that they united in their pupils the most invincible bravery and enterprise in action, with manners the most respectful, courteous and attentive, whenever the sword was replaced in its scabbard. Feelings of this sort were first originated in the mind by the lessons of religion. A true

votary of knighthood entered upon no adventure without previous devotion and prayer; and his sentiments toward God and the saints were such as are spontaneously excited in the mind by the contemplation of invisible and immaculate natures. CHAP. XX.

A candidate for knighthood must be grossly recreant to the true spirit of his profession, if he thought of the female sex with any sentiments of rude familiarity and disrespect. He was instructed, as the phrase above quoted implies, to contemplate them with a feeling somewhat partaking of religious homage and devotion. He looked up to them as the genuine censors of his deeds; and he considered it as nearly the first duty of his profession to relieve their distress, and to avenge their wrongs. It is the remnant of this sentiment which has given to the intercourse of the sexes, from the days of chivalry to the present time, a refinement, and a spirit of sanctity and honour, wholly unknown to the ancient world. and with feelings of passionate respect to the female sex.

The page was not only formed to a character of general deference to the milder sex, were taught, each of them, to

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but was also expected to select an individual among the young virgins of birth whose society he frequented, to whose service he was particularly to devote himself, and whom he was constantly to regard as the principal and peculiar judge of his actions [d].

select in that sex the particular object of his attention.

First prince of the blood.

During the early years of the earl of Richmond, the first prince of the blood, next after the children of the king, was Henry duke of Lancaster, grandson of Edmund surnamed Crouchback, younger brother to Edward I. The immediate predecessors of duke Henry, his uncle and his father, were factious men, who had put themselves at the head of the party of the barons in the turbulent reign of Edward II, and the former of whom had been led to the scaffold in consequence of his violence and rebellion. Duke Henry was himself however at all times a loyal subject, a gallant servant of the crown, and one of the greatest ornaments of the court of Edward III, being about the

[d] Ste. Palaye, Memoires sur l'Ancienne Chevalerie, Partie I.

same age as that warlike prince. He gained military glory in the wars then carried on in France; his munificence made him popular; his free and generous temper surrounded him with friends; and his moderation saved him from the grief of having perhaps a single foe. Thus qualified, we may easily suppose that his protection was coveted by the royal offspring, and his roof one of their most pleasant haunts. Duke Henry, the only person in England at this time denominated by that elevated title, and the second upon whom it had been conferred, had two children; Matilda, two years older than the earl of Richmond, and Blanche, exactly of the same age[c].

Matilda and Blanche, cousins to the minor princes.

[c] Sandford (Genealogical History, Book II, Chap. x.) has represented the lady Blanche as only fourteen years of age at the death of her father in 1361, and has quoted the *Inquisitio post Mortem*, taken at his decease, and preserved in the Tower of London, as his authority for this statement. Sandford's representation made it necessary to recur to his authorities. If he were right, and the lady Blanche were only twelve years of age at the time of her marriage, then indeed the whole of what is delivered in this and the two following chapters on the au-

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Why may we not suppose that earl John, and his brother Lionel, about fourteen months

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thority of Chaucer, must be erroneous. The result of my investigation has been this:

In the *Inquisitio post Mortem* taken at the decease of duke Henry, her father, (Esc. 35 E. 3, p. 1, n. 122,) the lady Blanche, married to John earl of Richmond, is stated to be xviij years old and upward (the age being expressed in small Roman numerals): and the lady Matilda, the other sister and coheiress, who is named after Blanche, married to William earl of Holland, is said to be xx years old and upward.

In the Fine Rolls of the same year, 35 E. 3, m. 23, there is a writ in behalf of the earl and countess of Richmond, dated at Henley, 16 July, in which she is stated to be of full age and to have issue, and in consequence of this she and her husband receive, with the consent of her sister, a certain portion of duke Henry's inheritance, which had before been reserved. The clause of the writ most to our purpose is in these words: *Assignavimus carissimo filio nostro, Johanni comiti Richmundiæ, & Blanchiæ, uxori ejus, alteræ filiarum & hæredum ejus ducis, plenæ ætatis existenti, cujus quidem comitis homagium ratione prolis inter ipsum & præfatam Blanchiam, &c.*

In these records therefore we see the lady Blanche stated, in the same year, and with the interval of a very few months, as eighteen, and as twenty-one, years of age. The last statement however is confirmed by the *Inquisitio post Mortem*, Esc. 36 E. 3, p. 1, n. 37, taken at the decease of Matilda, her sister, there styled the wife of William duke of Bavaria, in the following year. In this instrument Blanche is stated to be *ætatis viginti duorum annorum*, in words at length.

older than he (his elder brother, the Black Prince, who was born in 1330, is out of the question), declared themselves respectively, according to the mode of chivalry, attached to their princely cousins? In Lionel, who was in his infancy contracted to the daughter and heiress of the earl of Ulster, this boyish fantasy served only, as was originally intended in this sort of attachment, for the root and exciter of his youthful fancy; but the earl of Richmond was free from every species of engagement, and open to impression. In him therefore the partiality of the boy gradually gave place to the passion of the man; and what originally was thought of by his kindred, only as one of the agents in his education, became a material circumstance in the destination of his country. He married Blanche, and the single male issue of their union was Henry IV. CHAP. XX.

Esquires.

Ceremony of their instalment.

When he had attained to the age of fourteen years, the page of honour changed his class, and was raised to the dignity of esquire. This metamorphosis however was not effected without various appropriate and impres-

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sive ceremonies. The young candidate for military distinction was conducted by his father and mother, or two of his near relations, to the altar. These supporters carried each a lighted taper, and, having arrived at the communion table, made an offering adequate to the joyful occasion. The ministring priest then took from the altar a sword and girdle, and, having pronounced over them various benedictions, girt them with his holy hands upon the illustrious youth.

trained to the performance of menial services.

One of the essential principles of chivalry was that no office was sordid which was performed in aid of a worthy object. It was the pride of the candidate for knighthood to attend upon his superiors, and perform for them the most menial services. The dignity of the person assisted raised the employment, and the generous spirit with which it was discharged gave it lustre and grace. These services are implied in the very appellations of page, valet, and esquire or shield-bearer. It was the office of the pages of honour, and still more of the esquires, to spread the table, to carve the meat, to wait upon the guests,

to bring them water to wash, and to conduct them to their bed-chambers. They were enjoined to clean and keep in repair the arms of their lord, and to assist him in equipping himself for the field, on which occasion much skill was necessary for putting together the pieces of the armour, lacing the helmet, and securing the rivets and joints. They were inured to keep alternate watch, and make the rounds of the castle, in seasons of profound security, as in a period of siege. In like manner they attended the knights to the battle or the tournament, always remaining near them, delivering to them weapons and instruments of war, and rendering them every assistance in their power, but without engaging in the action. There is an exquisite beauty in offices like these, not the growth of servitude, not rendered with unwillingness and constraint, but the spontaneous acts of reverence and affection, performed by a servant, of mind not less noble and free than that of his honoured and illustrious master.

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Demeanour of the damsels, or young ladies of family.

The same spirit ran through all the habits and practices of chivalry. The daughters of the distinguished families of ancient times were taught an attendance upon the persons of the knights, not less humble and deferential than that of the esquires. They disarmed them from the battle, or from the fatigue of their military exercises, washed the dust and sweat from their brows, and were instructed with a soft and gentle hand to assist the wounded, and relieve and assuage the anguish of their wounds. We may without danger of mistake picture to ourselves the youthful earl of Richmond, and the princess Blanche, employed in these proud and generous services to their royal kindred, or to those contemporary heroes whose achievements had worthily made them the fellows of kings.

Exercises of the esquires.

A great part of every day was spent by the young persons educated to the duties of chivalry, in the open air, in exercises which conduced alike to the vigour of their bodies, the suppleness of their limbs, and a precision

of aim and motion in the command both of eye and of arm. It was their office to dress and beautify the war horses of the mansion, to bring them into training, to teach them their paces, and to form them to every quality which might most contribute to the success of the rider. They engaged in all those sports which were the image and prelude of the scenes of the tournament; they ran at the ring, they cast the lance, they exercised themselves with the sword, and tilted and justed with each other. Among the exercises enumerated as forming part of the education of an esquire, are also found those of leaping and dancing completely armed, of mounting on horseback or running on foot with a similar incumbrance, and of scaling walls with the assistance only of their hands and feet. The esquires were sent upon distant messages from country to country, and were accustomed to witness the tournaments and martial sports of various realms [f].

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[f] Ste. Palaye, ubi supra.

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Emulation.

The tendency of this education was to keep the youthful mind incessantly fixed upon the character and state which were afterward to be assumed. The probationers for knighthood saw for ever before them the gallant personages whose deeds were to be in maturer life the objects of their emulation; they were placed under their constant inspection; they received with undissembled deference their cordial and guardian lessons; they were perpetual witnesses of their table-talk, the subjects of which never failed to be the punishment of oppression, the rescue of the afflicted fair, the pride of combat, and the modesty of victory.

Period of knighthood.

Seven years was the regular period in which for the candidate for knighthood to remain in the rank of page, and seven years longer he was an esquire; at length, at the age of twenty-one he was admitted into that fraternity, to the participation of which he was taught to aspire almost from the moment of his birth.

Ceremonies with which it was conferred.

If the ceremonies which accompanied the admission of the pupil to the rank of esquire

were impressive, the solemnity was of course greatly accumulated, when the object was that of raising him to the dignity of knighthood. Austere fasts, and nights passed in prayer within the walls of some chapel or church, were the preparations by which he endeavoured to purify himself for so sacred an engagement. He then with peculiar devotion confessed himself to a priest, and received the sacrament of the eucharist. He was clothed in white garments, and underwent repeated ablutions in a bath; by these symbols to signify that he abjured the frailties and meaner defects of our nature. When he watched in the church, the armour in which he was soon to be clad was piled before him upon the altar, and constituted the object of his fervent contemplations. Having passed through the previous solemnities, he presented himself in open day, in the chancel or choir, with his sponsors, that is, with certain approved knights, who pledged themselves for the rectitude of his future conduct; and the officiating priest, having received his sword, pronounced over it his benediction. In fine, he came before the hero

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from whom he was to receive his concluding investiture, and, falling upon his knees, demanded the honour to which his heart aspired. The warrior put to him certain questions, designed to ascertain, with what intention he desired to enter into the order of knighthood, and whether his views tended to the maintenance and honour of religion and of chivalry. To these questions it was expected that the candidate should return a collected, modest and dignified answer. The oath of knighthood was then administered, and he received one by one the pieces of his armour, together with the *accolade*, or concluding signal of the investiture of his dignity. The oath he pronounced was that of devoting himself to the defence of religion, her ministers and temples; of showing himself brave in the field, loyal to his sovereign, and sincere and courteous to all; and of being ever ready to succour the widow, the orphan and the oppressed, at the expence of his blood and of his life[s].

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[s] Ste. Palaye, Partie II.

Such was the probation of the candidate of chivalry, when no particular circumstances occurred to disturb or precipitate the established train. In the instance of the young earl of Richmond, we know that he arrived at the goal of knighthood some years before the period at which it could regularly be conferred; and such exceptions were frequent in the case of young men of royal descent. CHAP. XX.

The year 1355 was the era of the first introduction of him and his brother the earl of Ulster into public life. The truce between England and France, which had subsisted about eight years, then expired, and their royal father accordingly prepared himself for a new and vigorous attack upon the neighbouring kingdom. The opening of the campaign did not take place till late in the autumn; the king having dispatched his eldest son on an expedition into Guienne, and taken upon himself the project of an invasion on the side of Calais. 1355. War with France.

The Black Prince was at this time twenty-five years of age, and, having made his apprenticeship in the art of war at the period of

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those hostilities which were distinguished by the battle of Cressy, was now deemed competent to the situation of a commander in chief. His next two brothers being about sixteen and seventeen years of age respectively, their father was resolved not to omit this opportunity of initiating them into a scene of real action. They had heard continually of the fame and gallant achievements of their father and their elder brother; they had been educated from their tenderest years for the character and sentiments of a soldier; they burned with desire to realise the lessons they had received; and the affectionate parent with whom they were blessed, could not have proffered them a more heart-felt gratification, than that which they now expected from camps, and tents, and marches, and well-contended fields of war.

Earl of Richmond enrolled in this war.

They arrived on the downs of Kent in the latter end of October, and from the opposite coast discerned the plains and towers of the hostile kingdom. Here Edward III. drew up and reviewed his army; and here, having assembled around him the two princes, and

knighted.

twenty-five other young gentlemen, sons to barons of the realm, who had never yet borne arms against an enemy, he explained to them the duties of a soldier, described the scenes they would speedily witness and in which they were called upon to engage, and, in the sight of his assembled warriors and an immense concourse of spectators, conferred upon them the insignia of knighthood [h]. CHAP. XX. 1355.

The channel was then crossed with a prosperous gale, and hostilities commenced in the true manner of the days of chivalry. A personal combat of the two kings was proposed. Historians are not agreed with which party the challenge originated. Froissart affirms that the defiance came from John king of France [i]. The English chroniclers state with superior probability that it was given by the invading monarch. It certainly was more in accord with his ostentatious and adventurous spirit, than with the plain, unassuming and ingenuous temper of his rival. Not to Defiances given and returned.

[h] Knighton, ad ann.

[i] Vol. I, chap. xlv.

CHAP. XX. 1355.

add, that it would have been a much more glaring example of folly, for the possessor of the crown in debate to have set his title upon a trial of skill, than for the prince who only saw it at a distance, and wished to obtain it. The single combat having been declined, a second proposition was made that they should fight with one or more assistants on each side [k]; and this vapouring at length subsided into a question of fixing a day when the two armies should engage in battle. The French however stood on the defensive, and shunned putting their fortune to the issue of the sword: and the English, after having committed a considerable degree of devastation and mischief, withdrew themselves, and consented to a truce of a few months.

Expedition into Scotland.

From France king Edward shortly after proceeded, accompanied in like manner by the earls of Ulster and Richmond, to Scotland. The Scots, always ready to cooperate

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[k] Avesbury, De Mirabilibus Gestis Edv. III. a Holinshed, &c.

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1356.

with France, as soon as Edward had already sailed for that country, put themselves in motion. They surprised Berwick on Tweed [l]. This place was, immediately on his arrival, recovered by Edward [l], who, to avenge the molestation he had suffered, committed such ravages in Haddington, Edinburgh [m], and the parts adjacent, that, the invasion having occurred about the beginning of February, the memory of it was long continued by the Scottish nation, under the appellation of The Burned Candlemas [n]. Baliol, the English pretender to the northern crown, joined Edward's army on this occasion, and executed a deed of resignation in favour of the invading sovereign, to which the names of the earls of Ulster and Richmond appear as witnesses [o]. David Bruce, the prince who by

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[l] Avesbury, ubi supra. Knighton, ad ann. 1356.

[m] Perth at this time continued to rank as the capital of Scotland; Edinburgh was not inclosed with walls till the year 1450.

[n] Hector Boethius, Lib. XV, ad ann. Barnes, Book II, Chap. [illegible] 2.

[o] [illegible]. Tom. V, 29 Edw. 3, Jan. 20.

CHAP. XX. 1356.

the Scots was considered as their king, was still a prisoner in England, having been taken at the battle of Neville's Cross in 1346.

Thus did the future patron of Chaucer flesh his maiden sword, and matriculate himself in the art of war. In the next year, the year of the ever-memorable victory of Poitiers, he remained in England with his father; and, during the two years immediately following, hostilities between France and England were suspended by a truce [p].

Manners of the earl of Richmond, as delineated by Chaucer.

As every thing which relates to John of Gaunt will be found to be essentially connected with the history of Chaucer, it may not be unamusing to give some attention to the temper and manners of the youthful prince, as they are described to us by his friend. The passages of Chaucer which most directly relate to the private and personal history of John of Gaunt, occur in the poem entitled the Book of the Duchess, written ten years after, on occasion of the death of Blanche, his first consort.

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[p] Rymer, Tom. VI, 31 Edw. 3, Mar. 23.

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Chaucer represents himself as approaching the mourning prince unseen, and accidentally overhearing the strains in which he laments the loss he has sustained. After some time Chaucer presents himself directly before the mourner, and salutes him. The prince is at first so occupied with his grief as not to hear the person who accosts him. At length however he sees Chaucer (who in the poem appears in the character of a stranger to his hero), and politely and mildly apologises for his inattention.

He saied, I pray the be not wrothe,
I herde the not, to [q] saine the sothe,
Ne sawe the not, sir, truely.
ver. 519.

Chaucer adds,

Lo howe godely yspake this knight,
As it had be another wight,
And made it neither [r] tough ne queint!
And I sawe that, and gan me' acqueint

[q] say the truth.

[r] difficult: *made it not tough*, was not repulsive.

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With him, and founde him so tretable,
Right wonder skil and resonable
(As me thoughten) for al his [s]bale;
Anon right I gan finde a tale
To him, to loke where I might ought
Have more knowleging of his thought.
ver. 529.

The following is Chaucer's description of the person of the mourner.

A wonder [t]wel yfaring knight,
By the maner me thoughten so,
Of gode [u]mokel, right yonge therto,
Of the age of foure and twenty yere,
[Gaunt was at the period of the death of Blanche in reality nearly thirty]
Upon his berde but litel [x]here.
ver. 452.

1358. His passion for the princess Blanche.

The love of Gaunt for his first consort has all the appearance, according to Chaucer's description, of a real passion. The mourning

[s] sorrow. [t] well-behaved, graceful in carriage.
[u] much: *of gode mokel*, exceedingly good. [x] hair.

lord is introduced as giving a detail of its history. CHAP. XX. 1358.

Sir, quod he, sithens firste I [y] couthe
Have any maner witte fro youthe,
Or [z] kindély understandinge,
To comprehende in any thinge
What love was, in mine owné wit
[a] Dredélesse I have ever yet
Be tributary and [b] yeve rente
To love wholly with gode entente.

ver. 759.

And, thilké tyme I far'd right so,
I was able to've lerned [c] tho,
And to have [d] conde, as wel or better,
[e] Paraunter either arte or letter;
But for love came firste in my thought,
Therfore I ne forgate it nought,
I [f] chees love to be my firste crafte,
Therfore it is with me [g] ylafte.

ver. 785.

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[y] was capable to. [z] natural. [a] Certainly.
[b] paid rent, acknowledged subjection to. [c] then.
[d] learned, acquired. [e] Peradventure, perhaps.
[f] chose. [g] left: *it is with me ylafte*, it remains with me.

CHAP. XX. 1358.

The mind of the hero being in a state so favourable to the reception of the tender passion, he comes, as he tells us,

Into a place there that he [h]sey
Trewly the fairest companie
Of ladies, that er man with eie
Had sene togithers in [i] o place.

ver. 806.

Among the ladies there was one

That ne was lyke none of the route;

and who surpassed her companions, as much as the summer's sun in its brightness

Is fairer, clerer', and hath more lyght,

than the moon or any of the planets.

Shortly, what shal I moré sey,
By God and by his [k]holowes twelve,
It was my swete, right al her selve.

ver. 836.

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[h] saw. [i] one. [k] saints, apostles.

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1358.

Nothing can be more spirited and interesting than the eulogium of this lady, which Chaucer has put into the mouth of her suitor.

Character of the princess.

I sawe her daunce so comély,
Carol and sing so swetély,
And laugh and play so womanly,
And loken so debonairly,
So godely speke and so frendely,
That certe I trowe that never more
N'as sene so blisful a tresore:
For every here on her hed,
The sothe to say, it was not red,
Ne neither yelowe' ne browne it n'as,
Me thought moste like to golde it was.

Her carriage.

Her person.

ver. 848.

But [l] whiche visage had she therto!
Alas! my herte is [m] wonder wo,
That I ne can discriven it.

ver. 895.

But thus moche I dare saine that she
Was white, rody, freshe, lifely hewed.

ver. 904.

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[l] what a complexion!

[m] wondrous sad.

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But soche a fairenesse of a necke
Yhad that swete, that bone nor [n] brecke
N'as there none seén that misse satte;
It was white, smothe, streight, and pure flatte,
Withouten hole, or [o] canel bone,
And by seming, she ne had none.
Her throte, as I have nowe memoire,
Sem'd as a rounde tour of yvoire,
. . . . . .
Right faire sholders, and body longe
She had, and armés ever [p] lith,
Fattishe, fleshy, nat grete ther with,
Right whité handes, and nailés rede,
Rounde brestés, and of a gode [q] brede.
Her hippés were, a streight flatte backe;
I knewe on her none other lacke.

ver. 939.

For certes nature had soche [r] leste
To make that faire, that trewly she,
. . . . that be it ner so derke,
Methink'th I see her evermo.

ver. 908.

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[n] brack, broken part. [o] channel bone, clavicle.
[p] taper, flexible. [q] breadth. [r] lust, desire.

CHAP. XX.

1358. Her disposition.

Her eyen sem'd anone she wolde
Have mercy, folly [s] wenden so,
[t] But it was ner the rather do;
It n'as no counterfeted thinge,
It was her owné pure loking;
For that the goddesse dame Nature
Had made hem open by mesure
And close; for, were she ner so glad,
Her loking was not folishe sprad,
Ne wildély, though that she plaide;
But er me thought her eyen saide,
"By God, my wrathe is al foryeve;"
Therwith [u] her liste so wel to live,
That dulnesse was of her [x] adrad;
She n'as [y] to sobre ne [y] to glad,
In allé thingés more [z] mesure
Had never I trowe créature.

ver. 866.

And soche a godely sweté speche
Yhad that swete, my livés [a] leche,

---

[s] fancied.

[t] But it was not so; the interpretation was erroneous.

[u] it pleased her. [x] afraid. [y] too.

[z] moderation. This alludes to the Aristotelian definition of virtue, as lying between extremes. [a] physician.

CHAP. XX.

1358.

So frendely, and so wel ygrounded,
Upon reson so wel yfounded,
And so tretable to al gode,
That I dare swere wel by the [b]rode,
Of eloquence was never fonde
So swete a [c] sowning and [d] faconde,
Ne trewer tonged, ne scorned lasse,
Ne [e] bet coude hele. . . . . .
Ne chide she coulde never a dele,
That knoweth al the worlde ful wele.

ver. 919.

She hadde a witte so general,
So whole enclined to al gode,
That al her witte was sette, by the' rode,
Without malice, upon gladnesse;
And therto I sawe ner a lesse
Harmful than she was in doing;
I say not that she n' hadde knowing
What harmé was, or ellés she
Had [f] coulde no gode, so thinketh me.
. . . . . .
And I dare saine, and swere it wele,
That Trouthe him selfe o'er al and al
Had chose his manor principal

[b] rood, cross. [c] sounding. [d] flowing. [e] better. [f] known.

CHAP. XX.

1358.

In her, that was his resting place.
Therto she had the mosté grace
To have stedfasté perseveraunce,
And ese [g] attempre governaunce,
That ever I knew, or wiste yet,
So puré sufferaunt was her wit.

. . . . . .

Therwith she loved so wel right,
She wronge do woulden to no wight;
No wight ne might do her no shame,
SHE LOVED SO WEL HER OWNE NAME.
[h] Her lust to holde no wight in honde,
Ne be thou [i] siker', she wolde not [k] fonde
To holden no wight in balaunce
By halfe worde, ne by countenance,

. . . . . .

Ne sende men into Walakie,
To Pruise, and to Tartarie,
To Alisaundrie, ne Turkie,
And bidde him, fast anon that he
Go [l] hodelesse into the drie se,
And come home by the Carrenare;
" And, sir, be ye nowe ful right ware

---

[g] temperate. [h] She desired. [i] sure.
[k] try. [l] without a hood.

CHAP. XX.

1358.

That I may of you here men saine
Worshippe, [m] or that ye come againe!"
She ne us'd no soche [n] knackés smale.
ver. 990.

The lover concludes his description by conjuring Chaucer to give full credit to its fidelity; to which the poet answers:

Sir, so do I;
I [o] leve you wel, that trewély
You thoughten that she was the best,
And to beholde the ald'fairest,
Who so had loked with your eyen.

To which the lover promptly and vehemently replies,

With mine! nay al which that her seen,
Saiéd and swore, that it was so.
ver. 1047.

Irresolution of the lover.

The princely narrator then goes on to describe the progress and fortune of his love. He remarks that, when he first conceived this

---

[m] ere. [n] tricks. [o] believe.

passion, he was extremely young; that "To love it was a gret emprise;" but that, "after his yonge and childely wit," he set himself CHAP. XX. 1358.

To love her in his besté wise,
To do her worship and servise.

He adds very beautifully,

For [p] wonder faine I wolde her se,
So mokel it amended me,
That whan I sawe her on a morowe,
I was [q] warish'd of al my sorowe
Of al day after, tel 'twere eve,
Me thoughten nothinge might me greve.
ver. 1097.

He then informs the poet that for a long time, after he had conceived this attachment in his own mind, the lady of his affections was entirely ignorant of the state of his feelings; so fearful was he to incur a repulse, or excite her displeasure. During this time "to kepe him selfe fro ydlenesse," he was often occupied with making songs in her praise.

---

[p] wondrous. [q] healed.

CHAP. XX.

1358. His propensity to writing verses.

The reader perhaps will feel some curiosity to be acquainted with the songs composed by a name sounding so venerable in our ears as that of John of Gaunt, when he was a boy of eighteen; and Chaucer has enabled us to gratify this natural desire. He has given us what his hero affirms to be the "[r] alther first" production of his muse. It is not indeed impossible that Chaucer should have thought proper to relieve the current of his lays by putting a fictitious sonnet into the mouth of his personage. But there are many reasons which may persuade us that this is not the case. It would in the first place have been a somewhat aukward and injudicious compliment to his princely friend, to have represented him as a versifier, if the idea was altogether without foundation. I think we may venture to say that we have Chaucer's authority for John of Gaunt having paid his court to the muses. Nor can any thing be more natural than the

[r] very first.

apology with which the lover introduces his stanza. CHAP. XX. 1358.

I made songés [*says he*] this a grete dele,
Although I coude nat make so wele
Songés, ne knewe, the arte so [s] al,
As coude Lamekés son [t] Tubal.
ver. 1159.

He is also express in adding,

And lo, this was the alther first,
I [u] n'ot whether it were the werst.
ver. 1173.

In like manner, in the commencement of the poem, where John of Gaunt is first introduced, Chaucer uses words of similar precision.

He made of rime ten verse or twelve
Of a complainte unto him selve,
He said a lay, a maner songe,
Withouten note, withouten songe,

---

[s] entirely. [t] Jubal. Vide Genesis, Chap. IV, ver. 21.
[u] wot not, know not.

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1358.

And it was this, for wel I can
Reherse it, right as it began.
ver. 463.

His first sonnet.

Without further discussion then, the reader will be pleased to accept the following as the specimen of the poetry of a youth of eighteen, a son of king Edward III, written in the year 1358.

Lorde, it maketh min herté light,
Whan I thinke on that sweté wight,
That is so semely on to se;
And wishe to God it might so be,
That she wolde holde me for her knight,
My lady, that's so faire and bright.
ver. 1175.

These verses however were composed by the royal lover purely for the relief of his own mind, and by no means communicated to the lady of his affections.

Chaucer his poetical preceptor.

Meanwhile they introduce, with sufficient probability, a new circumstance into the life of Chaucer and his patron. We have already seen that Chaucer resided in a house assigned him by his sovereign, as early as

the year 1358. He perhaps took possession of this house at an earlier period. It is reasonable to conceive that he had some connection with the royal family, and with his young friend the earl of Richmond, previously to his obtaining so signal a distinction as the donation of a house distant but by a few yards from the palace of Edward III. Since then we find that the earl of Richmond had an inclination to the writing English verses at the age of eighteen, we may well conclude that he owed this propensity to the intercourse of Chaucer. We are then, as it seems, sufficiently authorised to represent to ourselves the father of English poetry, and the royal stripling, reading together the works of imagination then in vogue. John of Gaunt was familiarly acquainted with the Troilus and Creseide; he had read with his admirable Mentor the romances of the great Norman poets; and he had had his fancy excited, and his taste refined, by perusing jointly with Chaucer, Statius, Ovid, and the other Latin classics whose works were studied

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1358.

with eagerness by the learned of the fourteenth century.

At length, after long hesitation and inward anxiety, we are informed that the lover resolved to tell his tale.

I bethought me that dame Nature
Ne form'd never in créature
So mochel beaute trewély
And bountie, withouten mercy.
ver. 1195.

His addresses are rejected.

The manner of his declaration is described with exquisite beauty and truth of conception.

In hope of that, my tale I tolde
With sorowe', as that I never sholde,
For nedés, and maugre mine hede;
I muste have tolde her, or be dede:
I n'ot wel howe that I began,
Ful [z] yvil reherce it I can,
. . . . . .
For many a worde I overskipte

[z] evil, ill.

In telling my tale, for pure fere
Lest that my wordés [y] misseset were.
ver. 1199.

To this declaration of his affections he encounters a repulse, which for one year reduced him to the lowest despair, so that, during that period,

——trewély he had no nede,
Ferther than at his beddés hede
Never a day to sechen sorrowe,
He fonde it redy every morowe.
ver. 1253.

---

[y] *misseset were*, should be unskilful, should fail of persuasion.

CHAP. XXI.

OUTLINE OF CHAUCER'S POEM OF THE PARLIAMENT OF BIRDS.

CHAP XXI. 1358. THE first poem which Chaucer wrote, so far as can now be ascertained, after he entered into the service of the court, is variously styled in different manuscripts, The Assembly of Fowls, and the Parliament of Birds. The subject of this poem is the suit or courtship of John of Gaunt just mentioned, and appears to have been written before the lady had accepted the addresses of her illustrious suitor. The natural construction therefore to be put upon such a performance is, that it implies a considerable degree of familiarity and confidence between the poet and the persons who are the subject of it: and indeed it is not improbable that it was penned at the request of the lover, for the

purpose of softening the obduracy of his mistress s resistance. As the lady is represented in the course of the poem as deferring the suit of her admirer for a twelvemonth, a circumstance which occurs again in the Book of the Duchess above quoted, and as the marriage was solemnised in May 1359, the date of the poem obviously falls upon the year 1358. CHAP. XXI. 1358.

This first courtly composition of Chaucer we may believe was written by the young poet with great care, and no ordinary degree of anxiety to produce something worthy of the masters into whose service he had entered. It was a new field that he was to occupy; and it was with very different feelings that he sat down to write. Hitherto he had been a poet in the purest and most unmingled sense of that word. He gave himself up to the impressions of nature, and to the sensations he experienced. He studied the writings of his contemporaries, and of certain of the ancients. He was learned, according to the learning of his day. He wrote, because he felt himself impelled to write. Impressions under which Chaucer had written his former works.

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He analysed the models which were before him. He sought to please his friends and fellow-scholars in the two universities. He aspired to an extensive and lasting reputation. He formed the gigantic and arduous plan of giving poetry to a language, which could as yet scarcely be said to have any poetry to boast.

His Parliament of Birds.

Now he was placed in a different scene. Without bearing the title of the court-poet, he was the court-poet in reality. He had no competitor. His superiority was universally acknowledged. He had been borne along on the tide of his acknowledged reputation to the eminence he at present occupied. He had the character of his country to sustain; and the literature of a nation rested upon his shoulders.

To every man a scene presented to the eye is impressive, much beyond the effect of any abstraction appealing to the understanding. This is still more the case with a poet, than with any other man. Chaucer had hitherto written for such as were lovers and discerners of true poetry, without well knowing, except

perhaps within a limited circle, where they were to be found. He now wrote for the court of England, a court which at this moment was higher in lustre and character than any other in the world. He wrote for the conquerors of Cressy and Poitiers. He had before him sir John Chandos, sir Walter Manny, and the other heroes who had won immortal note on those plains. John king of France, and several of the first personages of that country, were now prisoners in London. Edward III was, it may be, no profound scholar, nor eminent judge of poetical composition. But the ardent imagination of Chaucer was not to be stopped by such impediments. He knew that a piece in which he celebrated the loves of a favourite son of the king, would be often mentioned in the highest circles, and the name of its author often repeated. He aspired, it may be, to that fame which the writer himself may hear, which brings strangers and scholars and persons of eminence to desire the happiness of knowing him, and which surrounds him with grateful whispers whenever he appears, as

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well as to that fame which breathes incense from the venerable tomb a thousand years after the poet is no more.

Plan of the poem.

The Parliament of Birds is a poem marked with pregnancy of fancy and felicity of language. It is written in Rhythm Royal, the same species of stanza as that of the Court of Love and the Troilus and Creseide. It begins with an extract, beautifully expressed, of Cicero's *Somnium Scipionis* from the commentaries of Macrobius. The following stanzas will remind every reader of the manner of Spenser, mellifluous, soothing and animated.

Somnium Scipionis.

Then asked [a]he, if folke that here ben dede
Have life and dwellyng in an other place?
And [a]Affrican saied, [b]Ye, withouten [c]drede,
And how our present worldly livé's space
N'is but a maner deth, what waie we trace,

---

[a] Scipio the younger, the destroyer of Numantia and Carthage.

[a] Scipio the elder, the conqueror of Hannibal, whom the younger sees in his dream.

[b] Yea. [c] doubt.

And rightfull folke shull gon, after thei die,
To hev'n, and shewed him the galaxie.
Then shew'd he him the little yerth that here is
To regarde of the heven's quantité,
And after shewed he hym the nine [d] speris,
And after that the melodie herd he,
That cometh of thilke sperés thrisé thre,
That welles of musike ben and melodie
In [e] this worlde here, and cause of harmonie.

Then saied he him, Sens that yerth was so lite,
And full of torment, and of hardé grace,
That he ne shuld hym in this worlde delite;
Then told he him, in certain yerés space
That ev'ry sterre should come into his place
There it was first, and all [f] should out of mind
That in this worlde is doen of all mankynd.
ver. 50.

The poet had spent, as he says, a whole day in the study of the *Somnium Scipionis*. He informs us that he was extremely fond

---

[d] spheres. [e] heaven. [f] should be forgotten.

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of reading; and illustrates this by an apposite simile.

For out of the olde feldés, as men saieth,
Cometh all this newe corne fro yere to yere;
And out of oldé bokés, in gode faieth,
Cometh all this newe science that men [g]lere.
ver. 22.

At length the sun sets, the light by which he was reading is gone, and Chaucer betakes himself to bed. He dreams; and imagines himself, like the hero of the *Somnium Scipionis*, attended by the vanquisher of Hannibal. The passage with which he introduces his dream, forcibly brings to mind a similar passage in Shakespear, though it must be admitted in this instance that the imitator has greatly surpassed his original.

The werie hunter sleping in his bedde,
The wodde ayen his minde goeth anone;
The judgé dremeth how his plees be spedde;
The carter dremeth how his cartés gone;
The riche of golde; the knight fight with his [h] fone,

[g] learn. [h] foes.

The sicke [i] ymette he drinketh of the [k] tonne; CHAP. XXI.
The lover [i] mette he hath his ladie wonne [l].
ver. 99.

Under the conduct of the venerable Africanus, Chaucer arrives at a park and a temple, which prove to be consecrated to the God of Love. Considerable effort and vigour of mind are employed in a description of the scenery. The principal particulars which Chaucer has introduced in his account of the temple and the grounds immediately adjacent, are to be found indeed in the seventh

Temple of Love.

---

[i] dreams. [k] tun.

[l] She gallops night by night
Through lovers' brains, and then they dream of love;
O'er courtiers' knees, that dream on curtsies straight;
O'er lawyers' fingers, who straight dream on fees;
. . . . . .
Sometimes she driveth o'er a soldier's neck,
And then dreams he of cutting foreign throats,
Of breaches, ambuscadoes, Spanish blades,
Of healths five fathom deep; and then anon
Drums in his ear; at which he starts, and wakes;
And, being thus frighted, swears a prayer or two,
And sleeps again.

Romeo and Juliet, act II, scene i.

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book of Boccaccio's Teseide. Chaucer's imitation however, which is by no means a close one, contains many nice and beautiful touches, as well as some trivial and mean expressions, which are not to be found in Boccaccio. Among the former may be cited his description of the breeze which blows in the Garden of Love, while the birds carol aloft.

> Therewith a winde, [m] unneth it might be lesse,
> Made in the levés grene a noisé soft,
> Accordant to the foulés' song on loft.
>
> ver. 201.

The circumstance is also subtly imagined, and purely his own, with which he describes Venus, who had retired to an obscure corner in her temple; though it has the defect of repeating one clause of the passage last quoted.

> Darke was that place, but afterward lightnesse
> I saw a [n] lite, [m] unnethes it might be lesse.
>
> ver. 263.

---

[m] scarcely. [n] little.

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1358.

It may be regarded as a singular circumstance, and characteristic of the imperfect refinement of the times in which Chaucer lived, that a somewhat licentious description of Priapus and Venus is introduced into a poem certainly designed for the perusal of a virgin princess, of great youth, and unimpeachable modesty. These are also among the passages which are without a counterpart in Boccaccio.

Mr. Tyrwhit refuted.

Meanwhile it is by no means clear, as has formerly been remarked *, whether Chaucer took the story of Palamon and Arcite from Boccaccio, or from the Latin author from whom Boccaccio confesses that he drew his materials. From the circumstance that the description of the Garden and Temple of Love, introduced by Chaucer in this place, and which he has borrowed from the Teseide, or story of Palamon and Arcite, is not to be found in the Knightes Tale, the abridgment of that story in Chaucer's collection of Can-

* Chap. XVIII.

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terbury Tales, Mr. Tyrwhit thinks himself entitled to infer [p], "that the Poem of Palamon and Arcite must have been composed at a later period," than the Parliament of Birds. This proof however is by no means complete. It would follow indeed that the Parliament of Birds was written prior to the Canterbury Tales; but to establish that fact no indirect evidence is necessary. What passages might have existed in Chaucer's original unsuccessful poem of Palamon and Arcite, no trace of which is now to be discovered in his abridgment of it entitled the Knightes Tale, a reader of the present age is by no means competent to determine.

Inequality of the work.

The most glaring fault imputable to the poem we are here considering, is that the earlier and the latter half of the composition are by no means of similar substance, or well accord with each other. The first three hundred verses are of lofty port and elevated character. Nothing can be of graver mean-

[p] Canterbury Tales, note on ver. 1920.

ing, more interesting to the fancy, or more delicately expressed, than Chaucer's abstract of the *Somnium Scipionis*. To this succeed the Garden and Temple of Love, which, if they are not subjects of altogether so imposing a nature as the former, are yet fanciful, elevated, and full of poetical representation. The description of these being complete, what remains is that part of the poem which most properly answers to the title; the parliament, or assembly, of birds on St. Valentine's day to choose their mates. Chaucer here quits the Temple, and goes again into the garden, where, in a lawn, seated on a hill of flowers, and overcanopied with halls and bowers composed of the branches of trees, he finds the "quene, the noble goddesse, Nature," with the fowls of every different species assembled round her. CHAP. XXI. 1358.

This part of the poem is executed with a very active fancy, and the characters of the various birds are excellently sustained. Chaucer divides his fowls into four classes; the birds of prey, the water-fowl, those which live upon insects and reptiles, and those which Convocation of fowls.

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are nourished with seeds: and each of these classes has its representative; the falcon for the birds of prey, the goose for the water-fowl, the cuckow for the worm-eaters, and the turtle for the eaters of seed. The epithets applied to these personages are well chosen, not discovering the lazy and insignificant character often imputable to the epithets of inferior poets, but being all appropriate and expressive: and there is considerable humour in the vulgarity of the goose, the base selfishness of the cuckow, and the characteristic attributes of various other fowls which are successively introduced.

But, after all, there is something meagre and unnatural in this sort of allegory, where Chaucer introduces the lovers he means to compliment, under the personage of birds. We feel no sympathies for the amours of his male and female eagles. If the poet who attempts a plan of this sort, introduces any refined and animated sentiments, he violates the propriety of his allegory; and, if he adheres to the decorum of the fiction he has to sustain, he becomes insupportably frigid and

tedious. There are indeed a ridiculous inequality and unconnectedness conspicuous through the whole of this poem. Scipio Africanus is introduced with no propriety as Chaucer's conductor to the Temple of Love; and it would have been a still greater absurdity if he had been shown among the nightingales and thrushes stung with the passion of the spring on St. Valentine's day. Accordingly he is conveniently dropped. He is just shown in the commencement of the narrative, and is heard of no more. We do not know that he even enters the Garden of Love, at the door of which he serves the poet in the capacity of a gentleman-usher.

The heroine of the poem, according to Chaucer's arrangement of it, is respresented as a female eagle perched upon the hand of the goddess Nature. Three pretenders to her favour are introduced. Who these are it is impossible for us at this distance of time to determine; but it is probable that the number, and some other circumstances which are related respecting them, are founded in fact.

The heroine and her suitors.

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The first is plainly the earl of Richmond, who presents himself

With hed enclin'd, and with ful humble chere.
ver. 414.

The second eagle founds his pretensions upon the length of his attachment. The third, like the first, builds his hope of success only upon the fervour of his passion. They are all treated with considerable respect by Chaucer. They are all eagles; and he adds in summing up their addresses,

Of al my life, syth that day I was borne,
So gentle [q]ple, in love or other thinge,
Ne herden never no man [r]me beforne.
ver. 484.

The balance however is forcibly made to lean in favour of the first, or royal eagle; and his suit, though not accepted, is only deferred for a year, with every omen of final success.

---

[q] Plea. [r] before me, previously to this example.

This subject being dispatched, the assembly of birds, who had been exceedingly eager for their dismission, is dissolved. CHAP. XXI. 1358. The conclusion.

And lorde the blisse and joye which that they make!
For ech gan other in his wingés take,
And with [s] her neckés eche gan other [t] winde,
Thankinge alway the noble' goddesse of [u] kinde.

ver. 669.

At length, the shouting that "the foules made at [s] her flight away" rouses the poet from his dream.

I woke, and other bokés took me to
To rede upon, and [x] yet I rede alway.

ver. 690.

This couplet deserved to be quoted as an evidence of the poet's habits. We have here Chaucer's own testimony, that he was a man of incessant reading and literary curi- Chaucer's studious propensities.

[s] their. [t] embrace. [u] nature. [x] still.

CHAP. XXI. 1358.

osity, and that, even at thirty years of age, and amidst the allurements of a triumphant and ostentatious court, one of the first and most insatiable passions of his mind was the love of books.

CHAP. XXII.

OUTLINE OF THE POEM ENTITLED CHAUCER'S DREAM.—MARRIAGE OF THE EARL OF RICHMOND.

CHAUCER'S next production is that entitled his Dream, and was first printed by Mr. Speght, in the edition of 1597. It may be regarded as an epithalamium upon the marriage of the earl of Richmond and the princess Blanche, which took place on the nineteenth of May 1359[a]. It was therefore written after, probably immediately after, that pe-

CHAP. XXII. 1359.

[a] Walsingham, ad ann. She is styled countess of Richmond, in a patent in Rymer, dated 28 August in this year; Foedera, Tom. VI.

CHAP. XXII.

riod: in the eighth line the author speaks of May as the season of its composition.

1359. Story of the poem.

The story of the poem is peculiarly wild, and is a finished specimen of that species of composition which was most the taste of the day. Chaucer feigns himself to be transported in his sleep into a country inhabited only by women, which was adorned with every beauty that could charm the sense, and was emphatically the seat of peace, innocence and joy. The queen of this country was bound, by the law of her sovereignty, to repair once in seven years to a far distant island, for the purpose of gathering three apples, each of them possessing a secret and supernatural virtue; the first preserving for ever the beauty and youth of the possessor, the second nourishing by the bare sight more powerfully than the choicest meats, and the third having the property of defending its possessor from all attacks of sorrow or disquietude. The queen is absent on this expedition at the time of Chaucer's arrival; but her return is soon after announced.

She returns however less fortunate than

she had been on former occasions. She brings with her two strangers, a lady and a knight: the lady had anticipated her in the object of her expedition, the gathering of the apples; and the knight, at the moment of her disappointment in this purpose, had attempted to seize her by force, and carry her on board his ship. He was prevented from accomplishing his design by the lady who had gathered the apples. CHAP. XXII. 1359.

It afterward appears, that this knight, who was also the son and heir of a king, had been many years on his travels, in quest of an unknown lady whom he felt himself destined to espouse. He no sooner sees the queen who had sailed to the island of the apples, than he is convinced that she is the object in pursuit of whom he had visited a thousand countries; and, transported at so fortunate a discovery, he is hurried into an act of violence of which he speedily repents. The stranger lady takes both the queen and knight on board her vessel, and conducts them to the country where the return of the former had been impatiently expected.

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The queen however, offended at the licence he had assumed, or averse to every idea of matrimony, no sooner finds herself at home, than she sends notice to her presumptuous suitor that he must prepare to quit her country. The knight, overwhelmed with this repulse, falls into a swoon. Immediately after, Cupid, God of Love, arrives, with a great and splendid navy, and wounds the queen to the heart. The consequence is such as might be expected: the parties are contracted to each other, and the knight returns to his paternal dominions, that he may bring thence such an attendance as may best do honour to the solemnity of their marriage.

For this purpose he is provided by the queen with a miraculous ship which, without need of mast or rudder, and with a course changed by neither calm nor tempest, sails in any direction at the pleasure of its master. It has the further property of enlarging its dimensions; and, when the knight with sixty thousand attendants comes down to the sea-shore of his native place for the purpose of returning to his princess, it af-

fords to every one of them the most perfect accommodation. An unexpected calamity however awaits him: he found that his father had died during his absence; and, the preparation for the splendour of his intended nuptials taking up more time than he foresaw, he exceeds the period stipulated for his reappearance. The queen, believing that her knight has deceived her, and ashamed to have so lightly yielded her troth, resolves to die, rather than encounter the censures which will fasten upon her good name. The knight on his arrival is informed that she is no more, and immediately strikes his dagger to his heart. The bodies of the lovers, together with their mourners, are transported to the knight's country, and the deceased are lodged in a magnificent abbey there, where it had been usual for the kings, his ancestors, to be buried.

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The next morning, a very beautiful bird with feathers of blue and green edged with gold, enters the abbey, alights upon the bier of the queen, and sings successively three songs in a low and melodious voice. At length the little chorister is accidentally dis-

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turbed; and, attempting to escape, flies with such force against the window, that he falls to the ground, and immediately expires. Another bird presently after enters the abbey with an herb in his mouth, from which he takes a seed that he puts into the beak of his comrade. The dead bird immediately revives, and they fly away together. The abbess of the monastery, having observed this spectacle, resolves to try the same experiment upon the queen, which is attended with similar success. The queen and knight are both restored to life, and their nuptials are celebrated with every manifestation of splendour and joy.

Its historical application.

Mr. Tyrwhit has very idly suggested a doubt whether this poem were really composed on occasion of the marriage of the earl of Richmond with the princess Blanche: for so I understand his assertion, that "the supposed plan of this poem, prefixed to it by Mr. Speght, is a mere fancy [b]." The co-

[b] Account of the Works of Chaucer, prefixed to Tyrwhit's Glossary, §. xi.

incidences however which occur in the course of the piece are so numerous, as to place its application beyond all reasonable doubt. In verse 1990 Chaucer tells us expressly that the marriage of his fabulous personages took place in May; and the earl of Richmond was married on May the nineteenth. Many other corroborating circumstances we shall hereafter have occasion to mention [c]. Indeed there is scarcely one of Chaucer's productions the date and object of which are more clearly ascertained by internal evidence, than the one we are here considering.

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Beside the mere story of the poem, it also contains a number of particulars, essentially illustrating the life of the writer. It is from this performance principally that we have already extracted the passages which tend to ascertain the commencement of his residence at Woodstock [d].

But the most interesting articles of intelligence introduced by Chaucer into the poem,

Chaucer's amours.

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[c] Vol. II, Chap. XXIX. [d] Chap. XIX.

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relate to his own amours; and on this point, whether designedly or not, he has furnished material information. In his piece of the Court of Love, written at eighteen years of age, he represents himself as already smitten by the tender passion, and even as having experienced encouragement and acceptance from the highborn mistress he adored[c]. This was however either a fictitious adventure, or the impulse of a raw and youthful fancy which was immediately after suppressed. In his next subsequent productions he repeatedly assures us that he is a stranger to the passion of love. Thus in the Troilus and Creseide,

> For I that God of Lové's servauntes serve,
> Ne dare to love, for mine unlikelinesse:
> BOOK I, ver. 15.

and again,

> Eke though I speke of love unfelingly

[c] Chap. XII.

No wonder is, for it no thinge of newe is, CHAP. XXII.
A blinde man can not judgen wel in hewis: 1359.
Book II, ver. 19.

and again,

For al my wordés here, and every part,
I speke hem al under correction
Of you that feling have in love's art.
Book III, ver. 1337.

In like manner in the Parliament of Birds, written in 1358,

For all be that I knowe not love in dede,
Ne wot how that he quiteth folke [f] her hire,
Yet happeth me ful ofte in bokés rede
Of his miracles.
ver. 8.

In the poem now under consideration however, which was written in less than twelve months after the Parliament of Birds, Chaucer has completely changed his tone. His passion, conceived in 1359.

[f] their

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In the commencement he expresses himself beautifully and unaffectedly, in the very style of a man smitten with a genuine passion.

Of aventure withouten light,
In May I lay upon a night
Alone, and on my lady thought,
And how the Lord that her ywrought,
Couth wel [g] entaile in imagery,
And shewed had grete maistery,
When he in so litel a space
Made such a body and a face,
So grete beautie with [h] swiche fetures,
More than in other créatures.

ver. 7.

And presently after,

For on this wise,——
Not al waking, ne ful on slepe,
About such hour as lovers wepe,
And crie after ther ladies' grace,
Befell me [i] tho this wonder [k] cace,
Whiche ye shal here.

ver. 51.

---

[g] carve, sculpture. [h] such. [i] then. [k] case, incident.

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Nor is Chaucer contented with these incidental allusions to the lady of his affections, but introduces her as a principal personage in his tale. It is she who has anticipated the heroine in gathering the mysterious apples, who rescues her from the presumptuous attempt of the knight her lover, and who reconducts her in safety to her native dominions. Chaucer was an attentive spectator of the arrival and reception of the princess.

The object of it introduced as a personage in the story.

And thus avising, with chere[1] sad,
All sodainly I was right glad,
That greter joy, as I mote thrive,
I trow had never man on live,
Than I tho, ne an herte more light,
When of my lady I had sight,
Which with the quene ycome was there,
And in one clothing both they were.

ver. 299.

Cupid too, when introduced upon the scene, is not more remiss in his attentions to Chaucer's mistress, than to the queen herself.

[1] serious.

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And, as me thought, more frendlely
Unto my lady', and godelely
He spake, than any that was there.

Wherefore long in procession
Many a pace arme under other
He [a] welke, and so did with none other.

yer. 821.

At length the lady determines to return to her own country. On this Chaucer represents the queen as in the highest degree afflicted, and even proffering to resign her crown in favour of her guest, the better to induce her not to withdraw from her society.

For to the quene it was a paine,
As to a martir new yslaine,
That for her wo, and she so tender,
Yet I oft wepe when I remember;
She offered there to resigne
To my lady eight times or nine,
Th'astate, the yle, shortly to tell,
If it might plese her there to dwell,

[a] walked.

And said, for ever her linage
Should to my lady doe homage,
And hers be whole withouten more,
[a] Ye, and all thers for evermore:

ver. 1111.

a very extraordinary compliment, when we recollect that this fictitious queen is a lady of the most eminent rank, married to the third gentleman in the island of Great Britain; and that the poem in which this compliment is introduced, is a literary homage intended to congratulate these high personages on their marriage.

Chaucer's mistress, her quality and name.

We are naturally curious to know who is this mistress of Chaucer, whom he thus without ceremony places upon an equality with princes: and there will appear sufficient reason in the sequel [b], to persuade us that she was no other than the lady he afterward married. She was therefore the daughter and coheiress of Paganus [Payne] de Rouet, or Roet, a native of Hainault, and king at arms

[a] Yea.

[b] See Chap. XXIX.

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for the province of Guienne [p]. The station she occupied was that of *domicella*, or maid of honour, to the queen of Edward III [q]; and she had an elder sister named Catherine, who was attached to the person of Blanche consort to John of Gaunt [r], and who afterward became the governess to her daughters [s], Philippa queen of Portugal and Elizabeth duchess of Exeter. The wealth of the father of these ladies was probably not very considerable, but his station was that of a knight [t], and a man of honour. His daughters must be supposed to have been highly accomplished, and the fortune of the elder

[p] Stemma Chauceri, apud Speght; communicated by Robert Glover, Somerset Herald in the reign of Elizabeth. We shall have occasion to state the degree of weight belonging to the authority of Glover, in settling the question whether Thomas Chaucer, speaker of the house of commons in the reigns of Henry IV. and Henry V, were the son of the poet.

[q] See Appendix, No. I.

[r] Stow, A. D. 1396.

[s] Black Book of the Court of the Duchy of Lancaster, apud Sandford Book IV, Chap. i.

[t] This appears from a fragment of the inscription upon his tomb, preserved in Weever, Funeral Monuments.

was extraordinary. She succeeded finally to the bed and the hand of John of Gaunt, and by him was great-grandmother of Margaret countess of Richmond mother to king Henry VII, and ancestress to all the sovereigns who have since filled the throne of England. CHAP. XXII. 1859.

Nothing can be more delicate or ingeniously imagined than the conclusion of the poem of Chaucer's Dream, so far as relates to the lady whom he afterward married. Mr. Speght says, "Here also is shewed Chaucers match with a certain gentlewoman, who was so well liked and loved of the Lady Blanch, and her Lord, as Chaucer himselfe also was, that gladly they concluded a marriage betweene them [u]." But in this respect, "the supposed plan of this poem, prefixed to it by Mr. Speght, is a mere fancy [x]." The lady who is sent for in the most pressing manner to grace the nuptials of the queen and her knight, Mistake of Mr. Speght corrected.

. . . . . .

[u] Arguments to the Works of Chaucer: Chaucer's Dream.
[x] Tyrwhit, ubi supra.

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And prayed for all loves to hast,
For but she come all woll be wast,
And the fest but a businesse
Withouten joy or lustinesse,

ver. 2005.

is indeed, according to the suggestion of Chaucer's fancy, intreated to accept his addresses, complies, and they are united. But they were united, as Chaucer tells us, only in a dream;

And when I wake, and knew the trouth,
And ye had sene, of very routh
I trow ye would have wept a weke,
For ner was man yet half so seke:
I went escaped with the life,
And was [x] for fault that sword ne knife
I find ne might my life t' abridge.

. . . . . .

Lo, here my blisse! lo, here my paine!
Which to my lady I complaine.
And grace and mercy her requere,

. . . . . .

[x] at fault, distressed.

That of my dremé the substaunce
Might turnen once to cognisaunce.
ver. 2173.

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The marriage of the earl of Richmond was celebrated at Reading in Berkshire[z]; and Chaucer seems to intend to give a very exact account of its geography and attendant circumstances.

Marriage of the earl of Richmond.

And the fest holden was in tentes,
In a rome in a largé plaine,
Under a wode, in a champaine,
Betwixt a river and a well,
Where never had abbey ne sell
[a] Yben, ne kirke, house ne village;
In time of any mané's age;
And dured three monthes the fest.
ver. 2059.

And further on,

Unto a tent prince and princes
Me thought brought me and my maistres,

---

[z] Walsingham, ad ann. [a] Been.

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Which tent as church parochiall,
Ordaint was in especiall
Both for the feste, and for the [b] sacre,
Where archbishop and archdiacre
Ysongen ful out the servise.

ver. 2125.

With respect to the duration of the festival however on the spot where the marriage was celebrated, it is apparent that Chaucer, probably with a view to do the greater honour to his patron, has been guilty of exaggeration. A feast of three months, particularly when dispatched, as it is here, in a single line, costs the poet no more than a feast of three days.

Tournament.

The earl of Richmond was married at Reading on Sunday, May the nineteenth [c], being the Sunday before Rogation Sunday; and in the Rogation week a solemn tournament was held in London, the particulars of which are strikingly characteristic of the age of Edward III. The challengers were the

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[b] sacrament, office of marriage.

[c] Walsingham, ad ann.

mayor, the sheriffs, and the court of aldermen, and they undertook to defend the field for three days against all comers. Accordingly at the time appointed twenty-four combatants appeared, clad in complete armour, and bearing on their shields and surcoats the arms of the city of London. A variety of opponents presented themselves; but the city-combatants came off from every one of their contentions with the highest degree of credit and honour. The kings of France and Scotland, and many of the French nobility who had been taken prisoners at the battle of Poitiers, were among the witnesses of the spectacle. The citizens, says the historian, contemplated with the highest satisfaction this scene of their triumph; but were ravished with joy, when they discovered that Edward III, under the character of the mayor, and his four eldest sons, together with nineteen great barons of England, personating the sheriffs and aldermen, had done them the honour to fight under their cognisance [d].

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[d] Hollinshed, ad ann. Barnes, Book III, Chap. v, §. 12.

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1359. Harmony of John of Gaunt and his consort in the nuptial state.

We will conclude this chapter with a description of the nuptial felicity of John of Gaunt and his consort, as it is put into the mouth of the royal mourner by Chaucer, in the poem in which he laments her untimely fate, commonly called the Book of the Duchess. He affirms his domestic condition to have been

Of all happés the alderbest,
The gladdest, and the most at rest:
For trewély that sweté wight,
When I had wrong and she the right,
She wolden alwaie so godelie
Foryeve me so debonairlie;
In al my yothe, in allé chaunce,
She toke me in her governaunce;
Therwith she was alwaie so trewe,
Our joye was ever [e]iliche newe;
Our hertés werne so even a paire,
That never n'as that one contraire
Unto that other.—
And thus we liv'd ful many a yere
So well, I cannot tellen how.

ver. 1279.

[e] alike, equally.

CHAP. XXIII.

GRAND INVASION OF FRANCE.—CHAUCER APPEARS IN THE INVADING ARMY.—PEACE OF BRETIGNI.—EARL OF RICHMOND CREATED DUKE OF LANCASTER.—DEATH OF JOHN, KING OF FRANCE.

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IN the midst of these festivals and splendid exhibitions, Edward III. was engaged in the most serious discussions respecting peace and war.

Peace concluded between England and France.

The truce, which had been concluded between England and France in the year after the battle of Poitiers, was to expire at the midsummer of the present year; and this consideration had urged forward the negociations between Edward and his royal prisoner. At length the conditions of a treaty of peace were mutually agreed upon, and signed by both parties on the twenty-fourth

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of March [a]. The principal of these were the ransom of king John, the cession of Aquitaine and several adjacent provinces in full sovereignty to Edward III, and the renunciation on his part of all claim to the crown of France, as well as of his pretensions upon Normandy and the other northern provinces which had been held as fiefs by his ancestors, with the exception of Calais, and of a certain district which by the provisions of the treaty was annexed to it [b].

rejected by the states of France.

The terms of accommodation having been

[a] Duchesne, Histoire d'Angleterre, Liv. XV, Chap. xi. Polydore Vergil, Historia Anglica, Lib. XIX. Barnes, Book III, Chap. iv, §. 1. Collins, History of the Black Prince, ad ann. Matteo Villani (Istorie, Lib. IX, cap. ix.), who ascribes the whole transaction to the *usata astuzia Inghilese*, states the terms otherwise, and represents the whole of Normandy, in addition to the other cessions, as resigned in full sovereignty by king John. Duchesne (ubi supra) follows the authority of Villani. I am unwilling to adopt this representation, as it seems utterly inconsistent with the generosity with which Edward in other respects treated his royal captive. The terms of the treaty are not stated by Froissart. Walsingham, in a loose and rambling style, represents king John as hypocritically tendering to Edward Flanders, Picardy, Aquitaine, and other provinces.

settled between the respective monarchs, were next sent over to France for the acceptance of the regency and states-general of that kingdom. Here however the scene was reversed. The states-general, with one voice, under the approbation of the dauphin and his council, pronounced the conditions too rigorous to be endured, and declared that they would not purchase even the freedom of their sovereign, and the peace of their country, at so high a price [c].

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Expedition from Sandwich.

Edward was probably much disappointed at this decision. Peace having been signed between the two sovereigns, any further prosecution of the war seems to have been regarded in England as out of the question. The nuptials of the earl of Richmond were probably solemnised under this impression; the concord of nations, and domestic union, were intended to go hand in hand: and a contemporary historian [d] informs us, that the

[c] Froissart, Vol. I, Chap. cci. M. Villani, Lib. IX, cap. xviii. Walsingham, ad ann.

[d] M. Villani, Lib. IX, cap. ix.

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tournament held in London in Rogation week, (one of the principal festivals of the Roman Catholic church,) was intended to celebrate the happy restoration of general amity. The court of England therefore was proportionably exasperated at being again plunged into all the hazards of war. Edward immediately prepared for the renewal of hostilities, and entered upon his expedition in the close of the year with a more powerful armament than before or since that time ever passed the sea from the island of Great Britain[e]. He sailed from Sandwich in Kent on the twenty-eighth of October, with a thousand ships and one hundred thousand men[f]. He had with him his four eldest sons[g], and most of the principal nobility of the kingdom. He had summoned originally all the males in his realm, from the age of twenty to threescore, with certain excep-

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[e] Collins, Life of the Black Prince, ad ann.

[f] Barnes, Book III, Chap. v, §. 2.

[g] Froissart, cap. ccvii.

tions [h]; and he took with him the flower of this immense multitude. CHAP. XXIII.

1359. Chaucer engaged in the expedition.

Chaucer was in this expedition. For this we have his own authority [i]. On the twelfth of October 1386, he was examined as a witness, in a cause of arms, depending in the court-military, between sir Richard le Scrope and sir Robert Grosvenor, and in the beginning of his deposition states that he had already "borne arms twenty-seven years." This phrase is equivocal; and it was suggested to me by a person, curious in antiquarian researches, that it probably referred to the period at which he received a grant of arms from the sovereign. The conjecture was further confirmed, by the circumstance of the same word [*armeez*] being clearly used, in the next line of the deposition, to express a shield of arms. This interpretation however is unanswerably refuted, by a comparison of the deposition of Chaucer with the depositions of the other witnesses

[h] Barnes, ubi supra. [i] Appendix, No. I.

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in the same cause. They almost all state, just as he does, the period at which they began to "bear arms." Many of these are persons of ancient and noble family, whose shield of arms descended to them by inheritance, and who therefore cannot refer to a period when, by grant of the sovereign, they were first entitled to such a distinction. Several of them date from some known military epoch, such as the "battle of Poitiers," the "battle of Spain," and the "sea-fight of the Spaniards;" plainly demonstrating that the period they assign to their "bearing arms," was that at which they first drew their swords for the assault of an enemy. The phrase therefore being thus illustrated by the result of comparison, gives us, under Chaucer's own testimony, the date of his first appearing in arms against what were called the enemies of his country, *viz.* the autumn of the year 1359. The fact which he asserts himself to have witnessed in his military capacity, he states to have occurred in France; and there was no military expedition from England against that country, for three years

before, or for ten years after, this period. This reduces the date of Chaucer's appearance in the field almost to a demonstration. CHAP. XXIII. 1359.

Chaucer was not led to the scene of battle, as Paulus Jovius was by Charles V, or Boileau and Racine by Louis XIV, that he might be the better qualified to be the historian or poet of the scene. If that had been the case, we may believe that we should possess some composition of his upon the subject of the military accomplishments of Edward III. He went on the expedition as the friend and confident of the young earl of Richmond. He went that by such a proceeding he might acquire a clearer and more honourable name among the courtiers of his master. Military achievements were the passion of the age; and a man, whose destiny, like Chaucer's, led him to associate with soldiers and princes, could scarcely avoid making his appearance in arms, and trying the fortune of the field.

The first object toward which the English monarch bent his march was the city of Rheims, where it had been customary for the Siege of Rheims.

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kings of France to be crowned, and where he purposed to commence hostilities by a solemn inauguration in character of sovereign of the country to the dominion of which he pretended [k]. Upward of seven weeks he sat before the place [l], but his proceedings were in the nature of a blockade, and he did not attempt to take it by storm. During this period several excursions were made by the assailant army, and in one of the most successful of them, in which several fortified places were taken, and among them St. Menehoud, the name of the earl of Richmond appears as the second person of distinction engaged in the expedition, his father-in-law the duke of Lancaster having the principal command [m].

English sit down before Paris.

Edward appears to have expected to gain the city of Rheims by persuasions or threats; but, being disappointed in both, he at length

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[k] M. Villani, Lib. IX, cap. lxvii.

[l] Froissart, Vol. I, cap. ccx.

[m] Knighton, ad ann.

broke up his camp, and proceeded for Paris. The road he pursued in this march was extremely circuitous, through Burgundy, Nivernois, Gatinois and Brie, all which provinces he either laid under contribution, or wasted in the most ruinous and calamitous manner. At length he arrived before the metropolis on the thirty-first of March [n]; and, according to the mode of the times, sent in a challenge, urging the dauphin to appoint a day on which the French and English forces should meet to decide the fate of the kingdom [o]. But this prince, afterward surnamed Charles the Wise, had learned prudence from the example of his predecessors, the unfortunate leaders at Cressy and Poitiers, and resolved to stand on the defensive. After having encamped before Paris thirteen days [n], Edward thought fit to strike his tents and retire. His army had made a long and severe winter campaign; and, as he found it impossible to effect any thing against the capital

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[n] Fabian, Hollinshed, ad ann.

[o] Froissart, cap. ccxi. Walsingham, ad ann.

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by a *coup-de-main*, he judged it expedient to allow an interval for his troops to refresh themselves, before he entered upon his final operations. The scheme he professed to pursue was that of returning to the attack of Paris at the period of the vintage, and under such favourable circumstances as should give the utmost weight to his hostility [p].

Peace of Bretigni.

What the advantages were which Edward looked forward to for the reduction of the capital in the autumn, is somewhat uncertain. Such however was the effect of his menace, that the French regency immediately opened a negociation with him for a treaty of peace, if in reality it was not some overture of this kind which first induced him to break up his camp before the metropolis. France indeed was so circumstanced, between the capture of her king, the devastation of her provinces, and the anarchy and insubordination which had almost every where prevailed, as to render the restoration of peace a question of the

[p] Froissart, Villani, &c. ubi supra.

most imperious necessity. The terms were finally settled at Bretigni near Chartres on the eighth of May [q], and do not appear to be materially different from those agreed upon between Edward and the French king at London twelve months before. CHAP. XXII. 1360.

Though this treaty was extremely favourable to the crown of England, and indeed so favourable that nothing but a combination of the most distressing circumstances could have induced the French government to consent to it, yet it seems to have been otherwise considered by the generality of our historians. The subjects of Edward were dazzled with the magnificence of his pretensions to so mighty a sovereignty, and the spirit by which they were actuated seems in some degree to have descended to the authors who have detailed these events. Accordingly, the minds of the English were by no means prepared to be satisfied with any acquisition, less than that of the ostensible object of the war; and

[q] Rymer, Tom. VI.

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various artifices were at this time employed to reconcile them to the result. The duke of Lancaster, John of Gaunt's father-in-law, was now perhaps the most popular subject in England, and was therefore judged the most capable by the weight of his name to gain credit to the treaty of Bretigni. An argument has been detailed, and put into his mouth, by which it is pretended that he soothed the haughty andpresumptuous spirit of his sovereign, and gradually induced him to listen to the voice of sobriety and reason[r]. Another artifice employed for the same purpose, was exactly adapted to the understanding and temper of the times. During the pendency of the negociations, there occurred a terrible storm of thunder, lightning and hail, accompanied by such excessive cold, that six thousand horses and one thousand men are said to have perished in the English army. Edward professed to consider this as a declaration of the will of God, and a

[r] Froissart, Chap. cxi.

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proof that heaven had pronounced against his pretensions to the crown of France[r]. He humbled himself before the altar of Our Lady of Chartres, and accepted the terms which, a year before, had been settled between him and his royal prisoner at London.

Military character of Edward III.

This proceeding is nearly in the same temper as the celebrated story of the six burgesses at the surrender of Calais, related by Froissart. Edward seems to have affected the reputation of a stern and inexorable character: he had adopted, we are told, and fixed in his mind an unalterable resentment against the obstinacy of the Calisians; he had sworn on the present occasion that he would never revisit England till France was completely subdued[s]: but all this was probably a mere trick of policy; Edward voluntarily calumniated himself, that he might appear terrible in the eyes of his enemies. His vices and cruelties were no greater, than almost inseparably belong to an invader and a con-

[r] Froissart, ubi supra. Walsingham, ad ann. [s] Froissart, &c.

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queror; in his domestic character he was amiable and mild, and even in his military transactions we do not fail to meet with occasional traits of gentleness and humanity.

Still however it was the gentleness and humanity of a ferocious robber, the course of whose march might be traced by wasted fields, and flaming granaries, and half-extinguished ruins: those who desired to escape the miserable consequences of his hostility, were obliged to purchase their safety at an extravagant price. The generosity of Edward III. vented itself in a few gallant and courteous actions, in a liberal treatment of his prisoners, and in taking no unauthorised advantage of the knights and warriors with whom he had to contend: the very principle of the campaign upon which he had entered, was by devastation and the destruction of the resources of France to reduce the country to his mercy.

Chaucer withdraws from the military profession.

This was the scene which Chaucer witnessed. He did not visit it as a spectator merely: he ranked among the heroes who had enlisted for the conquest of an empire.

We may be satisfied that what he saw produced a very deep impression upon his mild and well-tempered spirit. It is thus that the philosopher should be educated; it is thus that the poet should learn the great and fundamental lessons of moral truth. Having already seen Chaucer, after a short experiment, throwing off the garb of a lawyer, we shall not wonder that he did not persist to cultivate the military profession. CHAP. XXIII. 1360.

With the peace of Bretigni Chaucer closed his military career. The war with France was not renewed till after the lapse of nine years; and, neither in the expeditions of John of Gaunt, his patron, during that war, nor in the previous campaign for the restoration of Peter king of Castille in 1367 in which John of Gaunt took a considerable share, do we find any trace of his having been accompanied by Chaucer. On the contrary, we shall meet with strong presumptive circumstances to convince us that, while his patron was abroad in these employments, Chaucer remained tranquilly in England.

The vocation of our author for the cultiva-

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tion of the poetic art was decisive; and, though he was prevailed upon by the spirit of the times, once to assume the character of a soldier, and to grace himself with that profession which was then esteemed above all others, we may believe that he welcomed with no small pleasure the return of that peace which was to restore him to his chosen and customary occupations.

His pacific disposition.

His soul had no delight in the alarms and enterprises of the field. Military glory, the universal mistress at that time of the enterprising and the bold, never captivated his heart. Chaucer is emphatically the poet of peace; and, while the romance-writers of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries are not less exuberant than Homer in the description of blows and wounds and fighting fields, Chaucer has not prostituted one line to the praise of the fashionable pursuit. If, in compliance with the mode which universally prevailed, he has occasionally introduced feats of chivalry, we clearly discern that he dwells upon them with no earnest partiality, and willingly leaves them for softer and more

innocent topics. In his poem the story of which is involved with the destruction of Troy, almost the whole tenour of his work reminds us rather of domestic and quiet scenes. And, when he compliments his patrons in what may be called his laureat compositions, it is a courtship or a marriage, a personal misfortune or a death, which he selects for his topic; and not achievements in arms, or the robbery and desolation of unoffending thousands. We shall be guilty of great injustice to Chaucer, if we do not recollect, among his most honourable commendations, the feature by which he is thus singularly distinguished from the whole band of the Greek and Roman bards his masters, the trouveurs and troubadours his contemporaries, and the Italian poets who came after him and who constitute the principal glory of the sixteenth century.

CHAP. XXIII. 1360.

Early in the year 1361 died Henry duke of Lancaster, father-in-law to the earl of Richmond, a victim to the plague[t]; and,

1361. Increasing wealth of John of Gaunt.

[t] Knighton, ad ann.

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1361.

about twelve months after, without issue, Maud duchess of Bavaria[u], coheiress with the lady Blanche his consort. By these two unexpected demises, the patron of Chaucer

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[u] Knighton, A. D. 1362. This monastic historian, upon whose animosity to John of Gaunt we shall have repeatedly occasion to comment, has thought proper in direct terms to insinuate that poison was administered to the duchess of Bavaria, "for the sake of restoring to the inheritance of her father its full integrity." The insinuation is repeated by honest Joshua Barnes (Book III, Chap. vii, §. 8), in a spirit very contrary to his usual reverence for royal blood, and improved with the addition, that this was thought to be done "that the inheritance might not be divided among foreigners." Barnes did not consider that, at the time of this prudent precaution, she was without issue, and, as Dugdale and Collins have affirmed, a widow. In that affirmation however these authors are erroneous. Dugdale boldly refers to the *Inquisitio post Mortem* taken on the decease of the duchess. But I have found Dugdale frequently careless in his authorities; and it is well known that, when a mistake has once been made by a writer of this sort, it is copied by all his successors. Matilda is styled in the record *uxor* and not *nuper uxor, Wilhelmi*. William, her husband, was one of the younger sons of Lewis IV of Bavaria, emperor of Germany, by Margaret of Hainault, elder sister of queen Philippa. He succeeded, in right of his mother, to the earldom of Hainault, Holland and Zealand, and the lordship of Friesland. He fell into a state of mental derangement in 1358, in consequence of which it seems probable that his wife returned to England;

suddenly became the wealthiest land-holder in England. In the enumeration of his property on this occasion, it appears that he had estates in eighteen English counties, beside several in the principality of Wales [x]. On most of these estates he had manor-houses or castles, according to the mode of the times, at which he occasionally resided. Many of them have been repeatedly celebrated by the writers upon English antiquities, for the solidity of their structure and the spaciousness and number of their apartments; particularly the castles of Pontefract, Bolingbroke, Kenelworth and Leicester. The duchy of Lancaster was also a source of immense wealth and power; and its peculiar immunities and privileges, great as they were in the time of his predecessor, were much enlarged by the

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and his death took place, he being still under confinement, in 1377. Moreri, Dictionnaire, art. Hainault.

The marriage of the Black Prince, the particulars of which will occur hereafter, was celebrated on the tenth of October 1361, and the birth of his first child, a son, occurred in 1364.

[x] Collins, A. D. 1361, 1362.

CHAP. XXIII. 1362.

parental affection and indulgence of Edward III[y]. The principal town-residence that devolved to the earl of Richmond, was the palace of the Savoy; which, when John king of France resided for four years a prisoner in England, was selected by his magnificent and generous captors for the place of his abode. This sumptuous edifice was first erected by Peter of Savoy, uncle to the queen of Henry III[z]; and was rebuilt from the ground by the father of the lady Blanche, when it is pronounced by the contemporary historian to have had "none in the realm to be compared with it in beauty and stateliness[a]." John of Gaunt, when he entered upon this immense inheritance, had just completed the twenty-second year of his age.

created duke of Lancaster.

The title of duke had never been conferred in England, previously to its being bestowed by Edward III. upon his son the Black

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[y] Collins.

[z] Stow, Survey of London: liberties of the duchy of Lancaster.

[a] Knighton, A. D. 1381.

Prince, and upon the earl of Richmond's deceased father-in-law. These two remained solitary instances down to the period when that monarch completed the fiftieth year of his age. This year he resolved to treat as an era of jubilee; and on the thirteenth of November, which was the anniversary of his birth, beside other proceedings by which he wished to stamp it as memorable, such as the enlargement of all debtors and prisoners, the restoration of such of his subjects as were in a state of banishment, and the abolition, by public ordinance, of the French language in all law-cases, pleadings, judgments and contracts within the realm, he also solemnly conferred in full parliament upon his second son Lionel of Antwerp the title of duke of Clarence, and upon his third son John of Gaunt the title of duke of Lancaster [b]. CHAP. XXIII. 1362.

The style of John of Gaunt was now Duke of Lancaster, and Earl of Richmond, Leicester, Lincoln and Derby [c]: and he claimed,

[b] Cotton, Abridgment of Records, ad ann.

[c] Sandford, Book I, Chap. iv.

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as earl of Leicester, the office of hereditary seneschal, or steward, of England; as duke of Lancaster, to bear the great sword, called *Curtana*, before the kings of England at their coronation; and, as earl of Lincoln, to be grand carver at the dinner given on that occasion [d].

1362.

All things were now gradually preparing the way for that extent of power, which John of Gaunt possessed in the latter part of his father's reign. His brother Lionel in the year 1361 had been commissioned as lord lieutenant to Ireland [e], where he continued to reside several years; and, the king having bestowed upon his eldest son the Black Prince, as a fief, the principality of Aquitaine [f], that victorious leader proceeded in February 1363 [g] to fix his abode there, that by his administration and his personal virtues he might reconcile the inhabitants of that province to the

1363.

[d] Appendix, No. XIV.

[e] Rymer, Tom. VI, 35 Edv. 3, Jul. 1.

[f] Rymer, Tom. VI, 36 Edv. 3, Jul. 19.

[g] Walsingham, ad ann.

English government, against which they had expressed some degree of dislike. The only one therefore of Edward's sons, having arrived at years of discretion, who now resided at home, beside John of Gaunt, was Edmund of Langley; and he, as has been already mentioned, was by no means equal to any of his brothers in abilities and attainments, while the new duke of Lancaster was, for the dignity of his deportment, and the gallantry of his spirit, an object of popular and general admiration. CHAP. XIII. 1363.

The peace of Bretigni, concluded in 1360, met with many unexpected delays and difficulties in the execution. These were principally occasioned by the chicanes and sinister policy of the court of Paris. The dauphin of France and his counsellors looked with extreme dislike upon the cession, not as fiefs, which had been the case before, but in full sovereignty, of some of the fairest provinces of their country. They could not abrogate the treaty which had been concluded; they could not replunge the kingdom into the hazards of war; but, while one 1364. John king of France revisits England.

CHAP. XXIII. 1364.

formality for the complete performance remained unexecuted, the case appeared in their eyes less desperate. The ransomed sovereign was of a temper opposite to that of his son. He was plain, ingenuous and sincere. He was therefore impatient of the arts and subterfuges of his own council; and, to convince his brother of England of the integrity of his purposes, he resolved upon the extraordinary step of coming to London where he had lately been a captive, and putting himself into the power of his conqueror[h]. It was on this occasion that he is said to have uttered that laudable sentiment, a sentiment which, if acted on, would have saved to mankind a world of woe, that, "if truth were banished from all other mortals, it ought still to find refuge in the breast of a king."

This illustrious, and now voluntary, guest was received by Edward III. with every demonstration of cordiality and affection, and

[h] Filippo Villani, Lib. XI, cap. lxxvi.

1364.

entertained with all that magnificence and profusion which were characteristic of the times. Among his inviters, the lord-mayor and aldermen of London particularly distinguished themselves. The name of Henry Picard, who entertained the same company seven years before, is now again mentioned with peculiar honour; and, beside the king of France, the English metropolis could at this time boast of the visit of David king of Scots, Peter king of Cyprus, Waldemar king of Denmark, and Albert duke of Bavaria. John of Gaunt yielded his palace of the Savoy as a residence for the French monarch, as his predecessor had done before: and after an abode of three months, which had been protracted by the attacks of disease, this unfortunate sovereign at length paid the debt of nature under the roof of his ducal host[1].

resides in the duke of Lancaster's palace of the Savoy.

Dies.

[1] Knighton, ad ann.

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ROMANCE OF THE ROSE, A POEM, TRANSLATED BY CHAUCER.

CHAP. XXIV.

Merits of the original poem.

IT was probably during the interval of peace which followed the treaty of Bretigni, that Chaucer engaged in a literary work of the utmost importance and honour to the age and country in which he lived, the translation of the *Roman de la Rose*. We have already had occasion to mention this poem. It was the most eminent poetical composition existing in any of the modern languages of Europe, previously to the *Commedia* of Dante. The French have a just claim to priority over all the European nations, in the invention of romances of chivalry, and the pro-

duction of every species of offspring of the imagination. The *Roman de la Rose*, which was written during the thirteenth century, placed their preeminence as to these early ages beyond the reach of rivalship. It may justly be regarded as the predecessor and progenitor of all that is most admirable in the effusions of modern, in contradistinction to the chivalrous, poetry.

The *Roman de la Rose* is a poem consisting of upward of twenty-two thousand verses. It is of much more considerable extent than the Iliad, and above twice as long as the epic of Virgil. No period of Chaucer's life can with greater probability be fixed upon for his engaging in so gigantic and formidable a task as this translation, than that at which we are now arrived. He was in the flower of his age; and the ardent and adventurous spirit of youth was as yet unsubdued in him. He was at leisure; while the subsequent periods of his existence were occupied with public office, with foreign employments, and with calamity. He basked

Period of Chaucer's translation.

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in the sunshine of court-favour, patronised as we have seen by the sovereign and his royal consort. His intimate and uniform patron, John of Gaunt, was lately married to a most accomplished and amiable woman, and had in right of his wife succeeded to the largest and fairest patrimony in England. Chaucer, as has already appeared, and will hereafter be more distinctly shown, was at this time a lover, a circumstance which might naturally predispose him to the translation of a work, the topics of which are the enchantments, the difficulties, and the sufferings of love. He was an unsuccessful lover; a situation which might render him less unwilling to transfuse into English the sharp and bitter reflections upon the sex occasionally interspersed in this poem.

In describing the appearance of a comely and beautiful youth in the course of the translation, Chaucer compares him to

The lorde's sonne of Wyndesore;

ver. 1250.

in the French it is simply

Il sembloit estre filz de roy,

ver. 1225.

Edward III. is certainly meant by the "lorde of Wyndesore." This was his distinctive appellation; he having been born at that seat, and it being the use of the times for persons, particularly those of rank, to take a surname from the place of their birth. Hence I infer that the translation was made after Chaucer had become an object of court favour, and was in the habit of beholding the sons of his master.

Petrarca's opinion of this poem.

Petrarca speaks with contempt of the *Roman de la Rose*[a]. This is as it should be. Petrarca, a true Italian, regarded with pedantic fastidiousness and loathing every thing that was ultramontane, and therefore it was natural that no literary production should excite in him greater impatience than the

[a] De Sade, Tom. III, p. 45.

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poem which Chaucer has translated. It does not follow that he was in any degree insincere in its condemnation. Men usually find in every book what they are strongly predisposed to find. Every work of human invention and effort has faults enough in it to satisfy the passions of the malevolent, and to justify to their own minds the scorn they express. Petrarca understood the *Roman de la Rose* no better than Voltaire understood Shakespear.

Its extensive popularity.

But, if this poem has been condemned by Petrarca, and derided by the fastidiousness of modern criticism, it was proportionately honoured in the applauses of successive ages. Petrarca, even while he condemns it, confesses that all France, with Paris at its head, was agreed in an opinion opposite to his. The last editor of this poem affirms [b] that though, previously to his impression, it had been many times printed, yet the number of

[b] Roman de la Rose, 3 Tom. 12mo. Amsterdam, 1735, Preface.

manuscript, was much greater than that of printed, copies; a most striking illustration of the esteem and request in which it was formerly held. Clement Marot, the author whom modern France, judging by the delicacies of style only, regards as the father of its poetry, printed an edition of this work into which he introduced so many variations, as almost to amount to what the Italians call a *rifaccimento*. Ronsard, a celebrated French poet thirty years younger than Marot, is said never to have been without this poem about his person[r]. Lastly, Regnier, a satirist, of the sixteenth century, who in France divides the palm of that species of composition with Boileau, has taken a part of this poem as the basis of imitation in the best and most applauded of his performances.

Its authors.

The *Roman de la Rose* is the joint production of William de Lorris and John de Meun. There has been some difference of opinion,

[r] Binet, Vie de Ronsard, apud Roman de la Rose, Preface.

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as to how much of the poem is to be ascribed to each of these writers. It has commonly been stated that the part written by William de Lorris ends at verse 4149 of the original, which, relatively to a work consisting of more than twenty-two thousand verses can scarcely be considered as any thing more than the introduction. This statement rests upon the authority of the rhyming summaries occasionally interposed throughout the work, and which are supposed to have been the production of the fifteenth century. The last editor however [d] gives it as his opinion that William de Lorris wrote 11135 verses, or about half of the poem. This opinion he founds upon the authority of a passage occurring in that part of the poem; where the God of Love is introduced as prophesying that here William de Lorris shall rest from his labour, and John de Meun shall take up the pen.

[d] Note sur le vers 11135.

Undoubtedly the authority of the body of the poem is greater than that of the summaries which were written at a later period; but on a narrow inspection perhaps these authorities will not be found to clash. At verse 11135 the author repeats with the variation of only one or two words, four lines which had already occurred at verse 4149, and then adds.

Cy se reposera Guillaume.

The words *Cy se reposera* may therefore perhaps as well be construed as referring to the place at which those four lines (in either construction the last written by William de Lorris) first appear, as to the place where they are a second time repeated. On this hypothesis the assertion of John de Meun at verse 11135, and the assertion of the author of the summaries in the fifteenth century, perfectly coincide.

Time when it was written.

The editor adduces, as a further argument to show that William de Lorris wrote more of the poem than has usually been ascribed

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him, a passage at verse 7098, where Charles of Anjou is spoken of as the reigning king of Sicily. In this passage the defeat of Manfred is mentioned which happened in the year 1266, and the decapitation of Conradin, the lawful hereditary claimant of the crown of Sicily, which took place in 1268. From the period of these events Charles of Anjou had peaceable possession of the crown, till the era of the Sicilian vespers in 1282, when he was finally expelled. This part of the poem therefore appears to have been written between the years 1268 and 1282; but it will not follow that it was written by William de Lorris.

It seems that it would be more reasonable from this internal indication of time, combined with the authorities above stated, to infer a correction of the received chronology of the poem. John de Meun informs us at verse 11164, that he entered upon the continuation of the poem more than forty years after the death of his predecessor. Taking then the mean term of the preced-

ing dates as the epoch of John de Meun's composition, and assuming that he began his continuation in the year 1275, it will follow, that William de Lorris died before 1235, instead of in 1260, the period assigned by Fauchet [c] and the subsequent writers. CHAP. XXIV.

It is not to be believed that a poem should have so extensively and so long engrossed the admiration of mankind, without possessing great intrinsic merit. We are not to expect however to find it a work accommodated to modern ideas, or which is not fraught with great and striking inequalities.

The main story, which exhibits the fervour and the difficulties attendant upon the passion of love under the emblem of a rose which is to be plucked, is ill-chosen and exceedingly ridiculous. We cannot interest ourselves about a hero, of whom the plucking this rose is to be the grand achievement. After a variety of obstacles and difficulties he Its fable.

[c] Origine de la Langue et Poesie Françoise, chap. 125, 126.

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first succeeds so far as to kiss the rose. He is then overwhelmed with the consequences of his own temerity, appears to be further than ever from attaining the object of his pursuit, and gives himself up to despair. Jealousy builds a wall, flanked with bastions, and defended by a strong garrison, to protect the rose from further violation. The God of Love on the other hand summons his baronage, to cooperate with the attempt of the adventurous hero. After a hard campaign, and a variety of stratagems and ambushes, the rose is at length gathered; at the same moment the dawn appears, the poet awakes, and finds every thing which had happened to be a dream. All this is undoubtedly to the utmost degree frigid and puerile.

The garrison of Jealousy, as well as the army of Love, is made up of allegorical personages. We have not only Danger and Shame and Chastity and Reason, but still thinner and more impalpable personages, such as Wicked-tongue, Well-healing,

False-semblant, and Kind-welcoming. What a miserable figure do such agents make in poetical narration, when compared with Venus and Mars, and Hercules and Apollo, and Hygeia and Hebe, with all their attributes and almost tangible reality, the deities of classical mythology!

Its language.

The language also of the *Roman de la Rose* is in a high degree crude and unpolished. The want of a happy and delicate choice of words is by no means its greatest fault. One of the most eminent marks of distinction between a poetical and a prose language, is the concentration of the poetical manner. In prose line after line creeps upon the reader unperceived, and provided a sentence presents to him collectively a mass of meaning, it is a point of comparative indifference whether that meaning is presented in ten lines or in six. But in poetry every line has as it were a separate life, and the interposition of one feeble line is a broad and glaring deformity. The language of poetry ought to be brief and concentred; and if at certain

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times it indulges itself in a larger enumeration or more voluminous flow, at least every head of the enumeration ought to be emphatical and effective. But this was a secret unknown to the versifiers of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Their favourite measure, that in which the old romances are usually written, and in which the *Roman de la Rose* is composed, is nearly the measure of the poem of Hudibras: and, as this measure seems to carry with it an irresistible temptation to lead on the poet from verse to verse and from page to page, we may conceive in what manner it operated upon the unformed taste of the poetical writers of the middle ages. There are many passages in the *Roman de la Rose* extending themselves through successive pages, which are distinguished by rhyme and measure alone from the laxest and most flagging prose.

Its relative excellence.

But, if we would estimate truly any work of human intellect or genius, we must compare it, not with the more finished ideas and art which may afterward have arisen, but

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with the degree of merit exhibited in preceding compositions; though there are passages in the *Roman de la Rose* which do not need to be compared with inferior works, to enable them to command our admiration. The *Roman de la Rose* was principally preceded by tales of chivalry: and, though in these there are often manifested brilliant imagination, wild and striking inventions, grand sentiments of honour, and a noble enthusiasm, yet the main topics of which they treat are so remote from the simple and unsophisticated sentiments of the human mind, and are so distended, colossal and unnatural, as to exclude the writers who narrate them from the most genuine and unfading beauties of poetry.

Imagination and manners.

Compared then with the romances of chivalry, the Romance of the Rose offers to us the most striking improvements. It commences with a rich vein of allegory and personification; and undoubtedly nothing can be more precisely and emphatically poetical than a well sustained personification. It has also,

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by means of the discourses and episodes occasionally inserted in it, a character of genuine humanness and life, and presents us with a finished picture of the manners, in many respects, of individuals in private society, as they existed in the thirteenth century.

Description of spring.

William de Lorris dreams, as Chaucer has commonly contrived to do, in the month of May, and his description of the season is exquisitely spirited and animated.

That it was May me thoughten [e] tho,
It is five yere or more ago;
That it was May, thus dreméd me,
In time of love and jolité,
That al thing ginneth waxen gay,
For there is nether [f] buske nor [g] hay,
In May that it [h] n'ill shrouded bene,
And it with newé levés [i] wrene;
These woddés eke recoveren grene,
That drie in winter ben to sene,

[e] then. [f] bush. [g] hedge. [h] will not. [i] wrap.

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And the erth wexeth proude withall
For [k] soté dewes that on it fall,
And the pover estate forgette,
In whiche that winter had it sette,
And then becom'th the grounde so proude,
That it wol have a newé shroude,
And mak'th so [l] queint his robe and fayre,
That it had hewes an hundred payre
Of grasse and flours, Inde and Pers,
And many hewés full divers;
That is the robe I mean [m] iwis,
Through whiche the ground [n] to praisen is.
The birdés that han left [o] her songe,
While thei han suffred colde ful stronge
In wethers [p] grille, and derke to sight,
Ben in May, for the sunné bright,
So glad, that they shewe in singing,
That in [o] her hert is suche liking,
That thei mote singing and ben light;
Than dothe nightingale her might
To maken noise and singen blithe;
Than is blissfull many a [q] sithe

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[k] sweet. [l] trim. [m] indeed. [n] worthy of great praise. [o] their. [p] frosty. [q] time.

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The [r] chelaundre and the [s] popingay;
Than youngé folke entenden aie,
For to ben gaie and amorous,
The time is than so savourous.
Harde is his herte that loveth nought
In Mey, when al this mirth is wrought.
ver. 49.

The translation of this passage, as well as of almost every other part of the poem, is no less singularly close and faithful to the original, than it is spirited, rich and flowing.

The author dreams that it is already morning, and that, animated by the beauty of the season, he rises from his bed, and sets out on a walk to enjoy the freshness of the odours. His path conducts him along the banks of a river, which is admirably described, and at length brings him to the wall of a spacious garden.

Garden of Mirth: its walls.

This garden proves to be the Garden of Mirth; and the author by a most ingenious fiction, in representing the walls, as

[r] goldfinch. [s] parrot.

Portrayred without, and well entayled
With many full riche portreitures,
ver. 140.

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has described the figures on the outside, as being of those passions and abstract qualities which are most opposite to Mirth; thus giving to this part of his composition, when compared with that in which he delineates the persons frequenting the garden, all the advantages of the most perfect contrast. The figures he describes are ten, *viz.* Hate, Felony, Villainy, Covetousness, Avarice (these two are distinguished by making the former represent eagerness of accumulation, and the latter the extremest reluctance to expend), Envy, Sorrow, Old Age, Hypocrisy and Poverty: and it is not easy to conceive any thing more animated or more consummately picturesque than most of these descriptions. As the progress of the poetical art in these early times must be exceedingly interesting to every reader of this work, and as the state of poetry under William de Lorris, one hun-

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dred years before Chaucer, is in some sense an object of more curious observation than even the poetry of Chaucer, there will be found in an Appendix to this volume the delineation at large of the personage of Old Age[t].

Its inhabitants.

From the inner side of the inclosure proceeds the sound of the "jargoning" of a thousand birds; and excites in the poet an eager desire to enter the garden. He finds the walls however impossible to be scaled, and therefore resolves to follow their circumference, till at length he comes to a wicket, which is characteristically opened to him by the portress, Idleness. He hastens to the presence of Mirth (in French *Deduit*), whom he finds engaged in an entertainment of singing and dancing. The persons of the dancers are then copiously described: Mirth with his partner Gladness; Love accompanied by Beauty; and next after her severally the ladies Riches, Bounty, Affability, Courtesy

[t] Appendix, No. III.

and Idleness, with their partners, whose figures are partly described, but to whom the poet has not given names. It is not without meaning that Riches is represented as immediately attendant upon (or usher to) Beauty. CHAP. XXIV.

The dance ended, the poet resolves to visit every part of the garden, and to observe its beauties at leisure. In this ramble he is followed every where, unperceived, by the God of Love, attended by his armour-bearer. After a variety of other beauties which present themselves, he arrives at a well, called the Fountain of Love, at the bottom of which, beneath the clear and translucent water, are two crystals, Fountain of Love.

That, whan the sunné clere in sight
Cast in that welle his bemés bright,
And that the hete descended is,
Than tak'th the cristall stone iwis
Againe the sunne an hundred hewés,
Blewe, yelow, red, that fresh and new is;
Yet hath the mervailous cristall
Suche strength, that the place over all,

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Both foule, and tre, and levés grene,
And all the [u] yerde in it is sene:

. . . . . .

For ever in whiche halfe ye be,
Ye may wel halfe the gardine se,
And if ye turne, ye may right wele
Sene the reménaunt every dele;
For there is none so litel thing
So hid ne closen with shitting,
That it n'is sene, as though it were
Ypainted in the cristall there.

ver. 1573.

The peculiar property of this fountain is, that whoever looks into it, will infallibly see something represented in the crystal which will fix his affections, and plant in him the passion of love. This, we are told, is the very fountain into which Narcissus looked, when he became enamoured of his own image.

The object which, among a thousand presented by this mirror, attracts the poet's at-

[u] garden.

tention, is a rose-bush, covered with roses, some full-blown, and some which as yet are only buds. He cannot resist the impulse to approach the object the image of which has impressed him with so strong a sensation. As he draws nearer the savour of the roses seems to embalm the air, and thrills through his nerves. Above the rest a half-blown bud fixes his partiality, and he would fain pluck it, but fears to offend the proprietor and lord of the garden.

The rose.

The God of Love espies his opportunity, and seizes his weapons. In the hands of his armour-bearer are two bows and ten arrows, the properties and effects of each of which are described; the one tending to generate a good and wholsome affection, and the other shame, villainous measures and despair. Love employs against the poet his better and more friendly weapons. He shoots at him, from behind a fig-tree, five arrows in quick succession, of which the poet draws out the shaft with the feather, but the barb in each instance remains in his heart. This

Commencement of the passion.

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done, Love suddenly leaps upon his victim, and calls upon him to surrender. The poet makes no resistance; and, to secure his conquest, the God fastens his padlock upon the lover's heart. The passion of the narrator for the idol of his choice is now complete, and there is nothing upon which his whole soul is more earnestly bent, than to gather the rose toward which his preference is determined.

Commandments of Love.

The God having thus secured his vassal, endeavours to inspire him with courage and good heart, and exhorts him cheerfully to perform the commandments which Love is accustomed to give to his votaries. The lover earnestly intreats to be made acquainted with these commandments: and here commences a discourse upon the art of love, occupying the space of eight hundred lines. In this part of his poem William de Lorris has taken advantage in several places, of his acquaintance with the works of Ovid; yet there is in it much of what is truly original and his own: and there is no portion of the

Roman de la Rose more qualified to excite and to gratify the reader's curiosity. To every one who is inquisitive respecting the manners of distant ages, or has a desire to perfect his knowledge of the nature of man, this passage must prove a valuable relic, and a most acceptable entertainment. The writers of these early ages had dealt so long in unnatural manners, forced heroism, and incredible achievements, that it must afford an enviable relief to a mind of taste, to meet with a passage so natural, so genuine and so human. In the adventures of Arthur and Charlemagne, of the Red-Cross-Knights and the Soldans, we scarcely recognise the features of our common species. They are like the strange, uncouth and unwieldy figures, which we see dressed up for a masquing or a coronation. With William de Lorris in the present instance we at once descend to the level scene of private life, and the parlours and domestic sentiments of our ancestors. The versifiers indeed who wrote before the Romance of the Rose, had their

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Romance writers.

Fableours.

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comic and satirical tales; but these, as well as the tales of high and heroic achievement, were strained beyond the true bias. They are exhibitions, intended to produce strong and unusual sensations, and do not present us with our fellow-man, undressed and unconscious of a spectator. In the counsels of prudence or of conduct which are here delivered to us, the most secret sentiments of the human mind are unfolded, and the minute impulses which often escape the observation of the man upon whom they act. The true lover of man feels an exquisite and incalculable delight, when he is enabled to perceive in how many respects the men of five centuries ago identify themselves with him and his contemporaries.

Historians.

This makes the difference between Livy and Froissart, the difference between the history on the one hand of the harsh, the haughty, the factious, the public-minded and stoical republic of Rome, and on the other of the good old people of England, the peasant in the midst of his family, the hospitable,

well-humoured and open-hearted country-gentleman, and the baron surrounded by his vassals, CHAP. XXIV.

> Whom they did ever honour as their guide,
> Lov'd as their father, as their master follow'd,
> As their great patron thought on in their prayers [r].

The manners of England under the Plantagenets were in many respects extremely unlike our own, the relative situations of man and man, of the higher classes and the lower, are usually said to have been totally different; yet it is only man with a little variety of garb, and exhibiting in the main, the same passions and humours, human frailty and human kindness. When the men of former times are shown as William de Lorris brings them to our view, the sacred awe with which we contemplate the airy shadows of

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[r] Lear, Act I, Scene i.

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the departed perishes from our bosoms, and they become to us our brother-men, living, moving and real. It is thus that in reading passages of great animation and fire in the best authors, we seem to hold direct communion with the author himself, and can scarcely be persuaded that the heart which dictated such passages has ceased to beat, and the eye which sparkled with such sentiments has ceased to glisten.—The discourse of the God of Love to his vassal is in many respects so curious and important, that it has been thought proper to insert it in the Appendix to this volume[v].

William de Lorris.

On the whole it may safely be affirmed that the first 2950 verses of William de Lorris may challenge a comparison with most of the happiest effusions of the genius of poetry: they exhibit an admirable variety of talent; and it will be found difficult to pronounce from the perusal, whether the

[v] Appendix, No. IV.

author excels most in the richness of his descriptive powers, in the spirit and force of his allegorical paintings, or in the acuteness and exactness of his observations upon life and manners. CHAP. XXIV.

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ROMANCE OF THE ROSE CONTINUED.—SATIRE UPON THE MENDICANTS.

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John de Meun.

THE part of the *Roman de la Rose* which was written by John de Meun is much more miscellaneous, and has infinitely less of the poetical spirit, than the part written by his predecessor. It is however by no means destitute of merit. The author has admitted into it an unbounded variety of matter, and made it the vehicle of all his satire, of all his observation upon life and manners, and perhaps of all his learning. Many classical stories are interspersed; and several of them, as the editor of 1735 has justly re-

marked, "are introduced in so unconnected and extraordinary a manner, that any other place in the poem would have suited them as well, as that in which they are inserted[a]."

False-semblant: satire upon the mendicant friars.

One of the individuals in the army of the God of Love is False-semblant, the offspring of Guile, begotten upon Hypocrisy. From the introduction of this personage John de Meun takes occasion in more than a thousand verses to pour out his spleen against the mendicant friars. False-semblant is made to give an account of himself to his commander, and in this account the poet has interwoven his satire upon religious imposture. He digresses into the history of William de St. Amour a distinguished polemical champion, and of all the principal controversies occasioned by the institution and proceedings of the mendicant orders. As this

[a] Preface: Economie et Ordre de ce Roman.

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history strongly tends to illustrate the manners and sentiments of these early ages, and is connected with certain transactions in which Chaucer was afterward engaged, a few pages of this work cannot be more profitably spent than in illustrating it.

Revival of learning in the twelfth century.

"The revival of learning" is a phrase which for a considerable time past has been almost exclusively appropriated to the period of the taking of Constantinople, and the age of Leo X. It has already appeared that the same phrase might without any striking impropriety be applied to the twelfth century. It was then that the night which threatened to bury all Europe in barbarism began to be dissipated; it was then that certain literary adventurers imported from the Saracens science, the investigation of nature, and the Aristotelian philosophy; it was then that romance was invented, and poetry seemed to be new created; and it was this period which was illustrated by the labours of Abelard, William of Malmesbury, Peter of Blois, John of Salisbury and

Joseph of Exeter; as well as of Turpin, Geoffrey of Monmouth, Benoit and Wace. CHAP. XXV.

This revival of learning however seemed at first to bear no favourable aspect upon the cause of religion, at least of the species of religion at that time established in Europe. During the period so justly distinguished by the appellation of the dark ages, the usurpation of the Roman pontiffs, and the dissoluteness of the clergy, particularly of the monks, had been without limits and without shame. While ignorance universally prevailed, the most imperious insolence was regarded with terror and veneration, and the most transparent veil of hypocrisy and affectation was sufficient to deceive the superstitious multitude. But, when the light of the twelfth century, however to us it may appear but a glimmering of intellect, broke in upon the church, it produced an effect similar to that of a brilliant lamp suddenly introduced into an assembly of persons the most disorderly and licentious, who had thought to practise their orgies with impunity under the friendly

Its effects upon the church establishment.

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cover of the night. If the usurpations and the vices of the church had proceeded with any degree of moderation, habit would have reconciled her members and subjects to the deformity; but the trial had been made in too deep a spirit of security, and the enchantment broke. There was considerable reason to expect that a violent disgrace and overthrow of the church would follow in no long time.

Rise of the mendicant orders.

In this crisis a remedy presented itself, exactly adapted to the nature of the evil, and the character of the times. Serious and conscientious men had reflected with anguish and despondency upon the dissolution of manners, and the progress of a scoffing spirit of irreligion. Multitudes were anxious for the revival of a practical sense of religious impressions, to raise again the drooping spirit of the church, and to recal Europe at large to the obedience of her spiritual father. As to the usurpations of the sovereign pontiff, that was a question to be settled by mutual accommodation, and a crafty and temporising

conduct, between the spiritual and the temporal powers. But the open immorality of the clergy, and the profligacy of the monks, required a more decisive interposition. This interposition was found in the institution and patronage of the mendicant orders. CHAP. XXV.

The two most celebrated of these orders were the Dominican and Franciscan, and they owed their origin respectively to persons of seemingly very opposite characters. St. Dominic was a priest of a most lofty and despotic temper, inspired with capacious views of policy and dominion, and impatient of an opposer. He it was[b] who led the sacred armies of the church in their pious crusade for the extermination of the Albigenses, and who invented that celebrated and tremendous machine which contributed so much to the maintenance of the Holy Catholic reli- St. Dominic.

[b] Mosheim, Historia Ecclesiastica, Cent. XIII. Part II. cap. ii, §. 24.

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St. Francis of Assisi.

gion for successive centuries, the tribunal of the Inquisition. St. Francis on the contrary appears to have been a melancholy and ingenuous madman. In his youth, we are told, he led the most debauched and disorderly life. Being seized with a fit of sickness, the consequence of his excesses, he became deeply impressed with a sense of remorse, abjured the commerce of the world, and restrained himself to so gloomy a solitude, and so severe a regimen of life, as macerated his flesh, and rendered his countenance shrivelled and ghastly. To subdue the ascendancy of the flesh, he rolled himself naked in drifts of snow[c]; and to terminate the hostilities of the enemies of the church, he made a voluntary expedition to Jerusalem, to convert the Saracenic soldan who presided there[d]. These two men conceived about the

[c] Bonaventura, apud Bayle, Dictionnaire Historique, art. S. François.

[d] Moreri, Dict. Hist.

same time, and probably without either deriving the idea from the other, the project of instituting a society of persons who should engage in the vows of celibacy and humility, and devote their lives to the offices of piety and benevolence. CHAP. XXV.

Vows of the friars.

Voluntary poverty was one of the fundamental laws of the monastic orders; but though according to the rules of these orders no individual could call the smallest trifle his own, the society at large might have property, and under cover of this indulgence they became, as the monastic discipline relaxed, wealthy, magnificent and luxurious. The institutors of the mendicant orders provided against this corruption, by refusing to their followers the possession of property, either private or public. They were accordingly wanderers on the face of the earth; without income, without money and without habitation; indefatigable in the duties of preaching, and in all pious and benevolent offices; travelling from city to city, and from kingdom to kingdom; subsisting upon the

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alms of the charitable, and refusing even of these more than was necessary for the most scanty subsistance. It is incredible how popular and venerable these fraternities, so strongly contrasted with the indifference of the secular clergy and the disorders committed by the monks, in a short time became. Their original sovereign, and the founder of the tribunal of the Inquisition, was pope Innocent III, the pontiff who exacted as a penance from John king of England the resignation of his crown to the legate of the holy see.

Their literary eminence.

The mendicant orders, with a foresight which may well impress us with astonishment, and which shewed a deep observation of the character of the age, added the cultivation of science, and the subtlest refinements of intellectual disquisition, to their exalted pretensions to an uncommon portion of piety and virtue. Thus they addressed all the prejudices and prepossessions then afloat in the Christian world at once. The subtlest intellects and the greatest wits of the twelfth

and the earlier part of the thirteenth centuries were almost universally of the mendicant orders; Albertus Magnus, Thomas Aquinas, Johannes Duns Scotus, William Occam and Roger Bacon. Considering then the variety of recommendations they had to boast, we can scarcely be surprised to find them in a manner all-powerful in the Christian church, and engrossing to themselves the entire authority of the Roman pontiff. CHAP. XXV.

The earliest opposers of the mendicant orders were the dignitaries in the several Western universities. We have already had occasion to observe how greatly they had risen on the disrepute of the monastic orders, and what formidable rivals they found in the Franciscan and Dominican societies[c]. The university of Paris took the lead among these establishments for the purposes of general education, and by natural consequence put Opposed by the heads of the universities.

[c] Chap X.

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itself foremost in the controversy with the mendicants. William de St. Amour, above mentioned, was the most considerable and most distinguished of her champions.

Evangelium Æternum.

The mendicants on the other hand were not slow to encounter, with all the weapons of argument and invective, the assailants who were drawn up against them. But defence is a delicate and a dangerous cause; and it not seldom happens that a proceeding or a dogma is more discredited by an unskilful vindication, than by all which its adversaries can allege against it. One of the most extraordinary literary productions which appeared on the side of the friars, and which has particularly attracted the attention of John de Meun, is styled *Evangelium Æternum*, and was commented on and illustrated in a second work, entitled *Introductio ad Evangelium Æternum*. The history of these books is as follows.

Abbot Joachim.

There lived in the eleventh century an enthusiast of the name of Joachim, abbot of Flora in the province of Calabria, whom

his contemporaries revered as divinely inspired, and whose prophesies they equalled with the most celebrated of ancient times. Like other prophets, a favourite subject of his effusions was the melioration of mankind, the introduction of a purer religion, and a happier and more disinterested state of society. Joachim may be considered as being with regard to Italy, what Merlin was in our own island, and Nostradamus in France. His prophecies were collected after his death, and published with the title of the Everlasting Gospel; a title borrowed from a text in the book of Revelations[f], where the evangelist is represented as "seeing an angel flying in the midst of heaven, having *the everlasting gospel*[g]."

This book of the abbot Joachim having fallen into the hands of some of the more

Mitigation of the rule of the mendicant orders.

[f] Chap. XIV, ver. 6.

[g] Cave, Hist. Lit. art. Joachimus. Mosheim, ubi supra, §. 33.

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zealous Franciscans, was regarded by their ardent and exalted spirits as prophetic of the founder and proceedings of their order. A controversy had arisen in the bosom of the mendicant societies respecting the due interpretation of the rules of their discipline, and one of the popes, having coincided with the sentiments of the less strict among them, published a bull, by which it was allowed to the mendicants to possess and to use certain places, habitations, chattels and books, on condition that the property of all these things remained in the Roman pontiff, to be disposed of by him at all times as he should think fitting[h]. This mitigation was considered by the severer party as a flagrant evasion of the spirit of their institution, and was justly represented as affording an opening to all the abuses so grievously complained of in the monastic orders.

Tenets of the spiritual party.

The severer, or as they styled themselves,

[h] Mosheim, §. 31.

the spiritual party, inflamed by this opposition, had their minds continually turned upon the sanctity of their founder, and the merit of their proceedings. Consulting the abbot Joachim, they found in the "angel flying in the midst of heaven," their patron, St. Francis; and accordingly they divided the religious history of the world into three epochs; the era of the Old Testament, which they termed the reign of God the Father; the era of the New Testament, which was the reign of God the Son: These they styled the imperfect ages, and maintained that Christianity, as well as Judaism, was now to be abolished, to make room for the era of the Everlasting Gospel, which was the reign of the Holy Ghost. The commencement of this era they predicted for the year 1260. The ministers of this great revolution were to be the mendicant friars, bare-footed and humble men, destitute of all sublunary emoluments, who were to reform the world, and effect the salvation of the human race. Filled with these

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notions and regarding the abbot Joachim as the prophet of their order, they represented the books of the Old and New Testament as mere dross and carnal accommodation, compared with the purer and more perfect principles developed in the Everlasting Gospel[i]. These opinions were arranged into a system, and published under the title of an Introduction to the Everlasting Gospel, by John of Parma, who was for a short time general of the Franciscan order, and had been expelled from that situation by the machinations of the party of the anti-spiritualists[k]. It seems even to be insinuated by the adversaries of the mendicants, and by William de St. Amour with the rest, that John of Parma, the commentator upon the Everlasting Gospel, had himself forged the book he undertook to explain.

John of Parma.

William de St. Amour, doctor of the Sor-

Claim of the Dominicans

[i] Cave, Historia Literaria, Conspectus Sæculi XIII.

[k] Cave, ubi supra. Mosheim, §. 32.

bonne, a celebrated establishment in France which originated about this time, was the most eminent of the adversaries of the mendicant party. We have already seen how formidable the mendicants had rendered themselves to the university of Oxford, by seducing the scholars who came thither for education, to desert the bosom of their *alma mater*, and take upon them the vows of perpetual celibacy and poverty[1]. They were not less formidable rivals to the most eminent Christian academy of those times, the university of Paris. The Dominicans claimed to exercise certain professorships in that university, and it will easily be conceived how great advantages such a situation afforded them, for the propagation of their principles, and the seduction of youth. This claim of the Dominicans was warmly contested for more than twenty years[m]; and the champions of the university felt themselves

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to certain professorships in the university of Paris.

[1] Chap. X.

[m] Mosheim, §. 27.

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impelled to investigate at large the principles and practices of the mendicant orders.

St. Amour *De Periculis Novissimorum Temporum.*

The principal work of William de St. Amour against the mendicant friars is entitled *De Periculis Novissimorum Temporum*; and John de Meun has contrived to interweave a sort of abstract of this work into the poem here under consideration. St. Amour resolved to encounter the friars with their own weapons. Finding that they drew a sanction to their establishment from the book of Revelations, he had recourse to the writings of St. Paul, and found a prophecy of the usurpation and ambition of the mendicants, in the predictions of that apostle respecting the "perils of the latter times, when the man of sin shall be revealed, the son of perdition, who opposeth, and exalteth himself above, all that is called God[n]."

Accusations against the mendicants.

Two points are urged with great spirit

[n] 1 Tim. Ch. iv, ver. 1. II Thess. Ch. ii, ver. 3, 4.

and emphasis against the mendicant orders by William de St. Amour, and after him by John de Meun. First, the conduct of these friars in insinuating themselves into the houses of individuals, hearing their confessions, giving them absolution, and seducing them from those spiritual pastors and bishops under whose care and superintendence the established order of the Christian hierarchy had placed them. John de Meun alleges in a satirical manner that the friars are very little disposed to exercise their powers of edification upon the poor, but that they confine themselves to the eminent, the powerful, and the wealthy. They urge, he says, in vindication of this conduct, that rich men are more exposed to the temptations of the world, have more sins to answer for, and therefore stand in more urgent need of spiritual assistance. CHAP. XXV.

The other point very elaborately treated against the mendicants is, their idleness, and their mode of subsisting upon the earnings of men more industrious than themselves. The

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friars alleged that Christ and his apostles lived in the same manner, wanderers on the face of the earth and without visible means of subsistence. But against this their opponents urged certain texts of St. Paul, in which he recommends to his followers to "work with their own hands[o]," and appeals to those he taught, whether he at any time accepted "any man's silver or gold[p]." St. Augustine is also quoted to prove, that devotion has by no means so exclusive a claim upon us as to supersede the exercise of secular industry.

For he that wol gone idelly,
And useth it aie besily
To haunten other menné's table,
He is a [q]trechour ful of fable;
Ne he ne maie by gode reson
Excuse him by his orison,

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[o] I Thess. Chap. iv, ver. 11. [p] Acts, Chap. xx, ver. 33.
[q] impostor.

For men beloveth in some gise
Ben sometime out of God's servise,
To gon and purchasen [r] her nede.

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ver. 6599.

John de Meun concludes his philippic against the mendicants by affirming that the friars are Antichrist, and rhetorically contrasting St. John (John of Parma) with St. Peter. He accuses the mendicant party,

And [s] than commaunden thei to [t] sleen
All [v] tho that with Peter yben.
But thei shall never have that might,
And, God [u] to forne for [w] strief to fight,
That thei ne shall ynough yfinde
That Peter's lawe shall have in minde,
And ever holde, and so maintene;
That at the last it shall be sene,

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[r] their. [s] then. [t] slay, destroy. [v] those.
[u] going before, favouring. [w] *forte* strength.

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That thei shall all comen thereto,
For aught that thei can speke or do.
And thilké law ne shall not stonde,
That thei by John have understonde,
But, maugre [x] hem, it shall adoun,
And ben brought to confusioun.

ver. 7291.

The Everlasting Gospel condemned.

It is obvious that the mendicants by the publication of this book of the Everlasting Gospel, with the comments of John of Parma, afforded their adversaries a great advantage against them. The doctors of the university of Paris immediately began the cry of heresy and blasphemy; and so importunate were they in their representations to the holy father, that pope Alexander IV. was compelled much against his will, in 1255, the year after the publication of John of Parma, to order the book to be suppressed [y]. He however took care that the mandate should

[x] them.

[y] Mosheim, §. 34.

be executed with all possible mildness, lest such a measure might in any way contribute to tarnish the reputation of the mendicants. Whatever might be the sentiments respecting the new orders, of the doctors of the university of Paris, who were principally interested for the cause of general learning and the good government of the church, the Roman pontiffs well knew that the friars were to be ranked among their steadiest troops, and would prove the most strenuous abettors of the declining authority of the visible head of the church. CHAP. XXV.

The friars were sensible of the advantage they possessed in so powerful a patronage; and the Everlasting Gospel having been condemned in 1255, a memorable embassy appeared before the pope in the following year, to complain of William de St. Amour's treatise *De Periculis Temporum.* Albertus Magnus was at the head of this embassy, and Thomas Aquinas the reporter[s] of the St. Amour condemned.

[s] Casimirus Oudinus, apud Cave, art. Aquinas, nota n.

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cause. The representations of these illustrious pleaders were attended with perfect success: St. Amour's book was pronounced libellous and heretical; it was ordered to be burned by the common hangman; and sentence of banishment from France was issued against its author[a]. Humbled by this proceeding, and deprived of their leader, the doctors of the university in 1259 gave up their cause in despair, and not only admitted the Dominicans to the professorships in question, but at the same time conceded equal privileges to the order of the Franciscans[b]. In the following year, which had been specified in the predictions of the Everlasting Gospel, the spiritual party among the Franciscans gained a victory over their opponents, and the decree of Innocent IV. mitigating the severity of the rule of St. Francis was solemnly annulled[c].

Victory of the mendicants.

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[a] Mosheim, §. 28. [b] ditto, §. 27.
[c] ditto, §. 32.

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No sooner however had pope Alexander IV, the great adversary of William de St. Amour, expired, than the latter returned to Paris, and was reinstated in his former dignities. The university was now less strenuous and peremptory in her opposition to the mendicant orders, but she received St. Amour with open arms, as the most generous of her champions, and the martyr of her cause. On his part, he shewed himself by no means subdued by the adversity he had sustained, and persisted as long as he lived in the most galling and unintermitted attacks upon the mendicants, the authors of his disgrace[d].

St. Amour reinstated.

Gerson, the most active and eloquent leader in the council of Constance in 1414, has expressed himself with the greatest abhorrence against John de Meun for his share in the composition of the *Roman de la Rose*, alleging that, "if he thought the author did

Gerson's censure of the *Roman de la Rose*.

[d] Mosheim, § 28.

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not repent himself of that book before he died, he would no more vouchsafe to pray for his soul, than he would for that of Judas who betrayed Christ[c]." This antipathy of the orthodox divine has sometimes been ascribed to the licentious sentiments occasionally interspersed in the work. But it is probable that it rather arose from the free insinuations of the poet respecting religious hypocrisy, and his attacks upon those orders of men, which Gerson well knew had essentially contributed to the prosperity of the Catholic Church.

These particulars relative to the history of the mendicant friars, obscure and personal as on a superficial view they may appear, tend eminently to illustrate the state of the church, and the temper and feelings which at this time prevailed respecting the practices of the Roman Catholic religion; and will probably be found, not only to fur-

[c] Rubric of Chaucer's Romaunt of the Rose.

nish the best commentary upon one of Chaucer's most voluminous productions, but also the fittest introduction to the history of those measures of ecclesiastical polity in which Chaucer himself was afterward concerned.

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ROMANCE OF THE ROSE CONCLUDED.—SATIRE UPON WOMEN.—FRENCH POETRY OF THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY.

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Satire upon women introduced into this poem.

THE discourse, which, as has already been mentioned, was imitated by Regnier, the satirist of the reign of Henry IV. of France, is considerably longer than that of False-semblant upon religious imposture. It is supposed to be addressed, by an old woman whom Jealousy had appointed porter to one of the gates of her fortification, to *Bel-accueil*, or Kind-Welcoming, a personage whom, as being one of the abettors of the lover in his adventure, Jealousy had seized and shut up in a strong tower. The Old-Woman is prevailed upon by a detachment of the baronage of Love, consisting of Largesse and Courtesy,

to release the prisoner; and previously to her dismissing him from dance, she addresses to him the discourse in question. It is sufficiently remarkable that, though the instructions of the Old-Woman are addressed to a stripling, they are so constructed as to have relation almost exclusively to the use of her own sex: a sufficient proof either that this discourse is a translation only of some satire which was already in the possession of popular favour, or that the poet had written it for a different occasion, and found it convenient to insert it in the present work. CHAP. XXVI.

The discourse of the Old-Woman may be considered as almost a complete code of female libertinism: and it is not a little extraordinary, that the very age in which the system of modern gallantry was perfected, and in which men learned to regard the gentler sex with a distance and awe, that borrowed its language from the phrases of divine worship, should be distinguished for depravity and licentiousness of manners. The tales which Boccaccio, La Fontaine, Voltaire, and others, have consecrated and immortal-

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ised with all the graces of humour and style, were the offspring of this period; and these tales are known not to be characterised by any feature more than by the salaciousness of their descriptions and the relaxation of their morals.

Plan of the satire.

The discourse of the Old-Woman in the Romance of the Rose is precisely in the same taste, and stained with the same errors, as the tales of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The idea upon which it is constructed is sufficiently ingenious. The Old-Woman had been in her time the very model of libertinism: but she is now infirm, and ugly, and poor, and discontented; and is desirous of instilling principles into her juniors, which may cause them to take such revenge upon the male sex for her misfortunes, as she is past the opportunity of taking for herself. She had received in her youth an infinity of presents from men who loved her; but instead of converting them into a fund to cheer her amidst the sufferings of old age, as she says she ought to have done, she had bestowed them as freely as she had received

them, upon a man who did not love her, but of whom she was infatuated. This favourite, it seems, had every vice that is incident to a profligate youth; ingratitude, and lechery, and gluttony, and gaming. He therefore dissipated the treasures of his mistress as fast as she supplied them.

Stung with the recollection of her misconduct in this respect, the principal lesson of her discourse, which she dwells upon with the greatest earnestness, and to which she returns at every interval, is rapaciousness. She advises her pupils to give no entertainment to the sentiment of love; but, guarding their hearts at every avenue, to be boundless and incessant in their extortions. For this purpose she recommends that a woman should encourage many lovers at once, and lay her snares for all; just as a wolf who breaks into a sheep-fold, and is eager to devour one sheep, flies at a thousand, and does not determine, till he has actually slaughtered his prey, which of the flock is destined to gorge the keenness of his appetite. The Old-Woman further proceeds to give rules

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for the manufacture of artificial beauty, and for assuming a specious and delusive amiableness of manners. She inveighs with great animation against chastity, which she treats as the bitterest species of slavery, and altogether contrary to the law of our nature. In this part of the poem the author has introduced a simile of a bird in a cage, which he expands with great vigour and felicity of imagination. "The bird," says he, "taken from the bright-green wood in which he was bred, and shut up in a cage, is perhaps fed with the utmost care, and provided with the most delicious morsels; he sings with every symptom of cheerfulness of heart, and his carols, which begin with the morning, terminate only with the darkness of the night: yet he desires the broad-branching woods, which nature had instructed him to love, and among which he so easily found nourishment and pastime; thither his thought is for ever turned, and all his study is how he may regain his unshackled condition; the food provided for him, urged by the passion which burns in his heart, he tramples under

foot, and traverses his cage with hasty and impatient step, searching where he may find a hole or a chink, which might serve as a passage to his beloved liberty."

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L'oysel du jolys vert boscage,
Quant il est pris & mis en cage,
Et nourry ententivement
Leans délicieusement,
Et chante tant que sera vifz,
De cueur gay, ce vous est advis:
Si desire il les boys ramez,
Qu'il a naturelment amez,
Et vouldroit sur les arbres estre,
Jà si bien ne le sçait-on paistre;
Tousjours y pense, & s'estudie
A recouvrer sa franche vie;
Sa viande à ses piedz demarche,
Pour l'ardeur que son cueur luy fache,
Et va par sa cage trassant
A grant angoisse pourchassant,
Comment fenestre ou partuys truisse
Par où voler au boys s'en puisse [a].

ver. 14717.

[a] We do not possess Chaucer's translation of this passage.

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The lessons of John de Meun's Old-Woman, how to receive two lovers at once, without awakening suspicion in either, and how to elude the vigilance of a jealous husband, are adroit and ingenious: but they have been so often repeated, either from him or from the older writers from whom he drew them, that they would no longer exercise the power of novelty over any modern reader.

Imitated by Regnier.

The discourse of John de Meun's Old-Woman has been imitated from the *Roman de la Rose* by Regnier, a poet of the reign of Henry IV. first monarch of the house of Bourbon, in his Thirteenth Satire, entitled *Macette, ou l'Hypocrisie Déconcertée.*

French poetry of the sixteenth century.

French poetry may be said to have experienced an entire cycle of revolutions in the sixteenth century; but it never reached, in that or any subsequent period, the pregnancy of fancy and brilliancy of colouring which we recognise in William de Lorris. The beginning of the sixteenth century was the age of Marot, who is vulgarly considered as the father of French poetry, and who first gave to his native tongue that beauty of style, that

Marot.

winning simplicity and native eloquence, which must always afford gratification to the reader of taste. It was the same charm which Amyot, and, with somewhat less severity of system, Montaigne, soon after gave to the French prose. The middle of the sixteenth century was a period of corruption and false taste, such as at some time or other seems to visit the literature of every country. Ronsard, and his imitators, filled their writings with pedantic allusions, with phrases borrowed from the learned languages, and with strained and unnatural ornaments, by means of which their productions are rendered in a high degree harsh and obscure. It is perhaps characteristic of works written in an ill taste, and at the same time stamped with the marks of energy and individuality of thinking, that their first success is occasionally more brilliant and astonishing than that of works, of which the excellence is sterling, and calculated to secure their reception to the latest posterity. Such is the case with Ronsard, Du Bellay and Du Bartas; of the last of whom upward of thirty editions

Ronsard, Du Bellay and Du Bartas.

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are said to have been printed within the space of five or six years [b].

The reign of Henry IV. of France was the period in which this false taste was exploded. The two great ornaments of this period are Regnier and Malherbe.

Malherbe.

Malherbe is universally treated by the French critics as the creator of their genuine classical poetry. He gave the law which has ever since been maintained; and no French writer of verses has wandered out of the course marked for him by Malherbe, with impunity. He taught to compress a sentiment or a saying within the limits of a couplet, and by that means to take from it feebleness and prolixity, and give it zest and an aptness to be remembered. He gave to the versification of his country that degree of harmony and rythm of which it is entitled to boast; and he expressed his meaning with clearness, and what the French call elevation,

[b] Moreri, Dictionnaire, art. Du Bartas. His words are, *On n'a pas laissé d'en faire en moins de cinq ou six ans plus de vingt ou trente éditions.*

that is, an exemption from phrases low, colloquial and trite. His words fall into their just and natural places, and his language is elegant and unforced.

But, if French poetry is indebted to Malherbe for its greatest excellences, it may perhaps be said to have had entailed upon it by him all its defects. Malherbe was a slow and elaborate writer. His manner is finished with the nicest care; but his matter scarcely shows itself worthy of the cost of its attire. He has no copiousness of imagination, or boldness of thought. The character which Regnier gives of him in one of his satires, was the fruit of provocation [c], and is of course ex-

[c] The provocation was this. Desportes, the uncle of Regnier and one of the most respectable poets of his day, gave a dinner to a literary party, at which both Regnier and Malherbe were present. When they entered, the soup was already served. The venerable old man rose from table to do honour to his guest; and, having mentioned a Version of the Psalms which he had just published, added that he would go and fetch a copy, which he would request Malherbe to do him the favour to accept. Malherbe, the most caustic and cynical of men, begged that he would not give himself that trouble, observed that he had seen the book, and sarcastically remarked that the old gentle-

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aggerated; but it is happily conceived, and in all that is fundamental is sufficiently borne out by the productions of him who is the subject of it. Regnier has thought proper to make a class of the person he censures, and to express his invective in the plural number.

Cependant, leur sçavoir ne s'estend seulement
Qu'à regratter un mot douteux au jugement,
Prendre garde qu'un *qui* ne heurte une diphtongue;
Espier si des vers la rime est breve ou longue;
Ou bien si la voyelle à l'autre s'unissant,
Ne rend point à l'oreille un vers trop languissant;

---

man's soup would give him more satisfaction than his Psalms. The good humour of the party was immediately overclouded; and Regnier, stung with the affront offered to his honourable kinsman, poured out his feelings in one of his satires, in which, in a generous and dignified manner, he expatiates upon the talents of his contemporary poets, in opposition to Malherbe, whom he represents as denying the smallest merit to any of them.

Racan, apud Oeuvres de Regnier, Edit. 1780.

Et laissent sur le verd le noble de l'ouvrage.
Nul esguillon divin n'esleve leur courage;
Ils rampent bassement, foibles d'inventions,
Et n'osent, peu hardis, tenter les fictions,
Froids à l'imaginer: car s'ils font quelque chose,
C'est proser de la rime, & rimer de la prose,
Que l'art lime, & relime, & polit de façon
Qu'elle rend à l'oreille un agréable son;
Et voyant qu'un beau feu leur cervelle n'embrase,
Ils attisent leurs mots, enjolivent leur phrase,
Affectent leurs discours tout si relevé d'art,
Et peignent leurs deffaux de couleur & de fard.

Satyre IX.

Inferior thoughts alone their powers engage;
To clear of doubtful words the elaborate page,
To choose their tinkling rhymes with nicest care,
Nor rugged sounds, nor gaping vowels spare,
Terms stain'd by vulgar use to banish thence,
Nor let one homely line affright the sense.
Such is their praise: unconscious of the fire,
That bids the rapt enthusiast aspire,

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Ingloriously they hold their equal way:
Guiltless of fiction's magic, fancy's play,
No lightnings flash in their well-number'd speech,
Or reptile verse; and all the grace they reach,
Is with neat phrase, and words of glittering show,
To clothe the half-starv'd thought that skulks below:
So wither'd matrons, when their reign is o'er,
Seek to replace with art what nature gives no more[d].

Regnier.

Regnier, if he is not more of a poet than Malherbe, appears to have at least an equal sweetness and correctness of versification. He is the versifier of good sense; but his good sense flows with vigour, spirit and ease. We are surprised to find so polished a language and air in a writer who so considerably preceded the Augustan age of Louis XIV. It

[d] For this translation I am indebted to the kindness of a friend, whose poetical merits are above my praise, and with whose name I was desirous to have inscribed this page of my work.

would be very difficult, at least for a reader not a native of France, to discover any important particular in which Boileau has the advantage over the contemporary of Malherbe. CHAP. XXVI.

Regnier has selected only those parts from the discourse of the Old-Woman in the *Roman de la Rose*, which comprise the panegyric and the maxims of rapaciousness. He feigns that a beautiful and uncorrupted girl to whom he pays his addresses, is visited by a lean and sanctified devotee of her own sex, whose person and manners bear every mark of religious austerity; and he puts into her mouth the libertine principles of John de Meun. At the arrival of this mortified dame the poet is present; but, finding the prattle of the two ladies likely to proceed to an insufferable length, he takes occasion to withdraw. He is however suddenly seized with a curiosity to overhear their discourse. He conceals himself, and in consequence becomes an ear-witness of the lessons of the grey-headed hypocrite, who among various topics does not forget to paint to her pupil in the most dis- His poem of Macette.

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graceful colours the character of the poet. During the whole of the discourse however, she has a jealous and vigilant eye continually wandering from one part of the room to another, and at length discovers the poet in his hiding-place. This puts an abrupt close to her harangue: she takes a hasty leave, and defers the rest of her instructions to the next day.

It is obvious to remark with how much better a grace Regnier introduces the exhibition of these libertine lessons, than his predecessor had done. Indeed John de Meun has chosen exactly the most aukward and ill-contrived vehicle that malice itself could have supplied to an unfortunate author; and on that account his satire undoubtedly loses the greater part of its force. It is also a point of no little curiosity to compare the sluggish and dislocated style of the ancient poet, with the classical correctness and compression of Regnier in conveying the same sentiments.

Chaucer's translation of the *Roman de la Rose.*

The discourse of the Old-Woman is not to be found in Chaucer's Romaunt of the Rose. His poem, as we possess it, contains

only 7698 verses, instead of 22,734, which is the extent of the original. It is probable however that Chaucer translated the whole. A breach of no less than 5883 verses occurs in the middle of Chaucer's poem, beside various errors and transpositions; and it is easy to believe that the same causes which have deprived us of so large a portion of the early part of his translation, should have occasioned the total loss of the latter half of it.

Object of the translator.

The translation of the Romance of the Rose was of the utmost importance to Chaucer's grand project, of effecting a complete coalition and incorporation of the language of his native country and the language of poetry. The Romance of the Rose was the great modern poem, which had made its appearance at so early a period. Its popularity was high, and its merit as yet undisputed. It was written in the language which, even to this time, was the language of the court of London. Unless it were transfused into our native tongue, every lover of poetical sentiment and poetical fiction might be expected to learn French that he might read

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it; and, having first savoured the choicest beauties of poetry in that language, it would be difficult, if not impossible, to effect a divorce between two things which had been so early and so strongly associated in his mind. We may therefore picture to ourselves Chaucer as entering upon this task, with a concentered mind, "long meditating and beginning late," and having anxiously watched for a period of leisure accommodated to so large an undertaking. It must probably have occupied a space of two or three years at least; and Chaucer must be supposed to have regarded the completion of it as a principal epoch in the youthful engagements of his life. When he had finished it, he no doubt congratulated himself as having effected one principal step toward making the native language of England the genuine and familiar vehicle of poetical fancies, and of rich and many-coloured fiction, to the ears of his countrymen.

CHAP. XXVII.

COURT OF THE BLACK PRINCE AT BOURDEAUX.—WAR IN SPAIN.—DUKE OF LANCASTER DISTINGUISHES HIMSELF IN THIS WAR.—SICKNESS OF THE BLACK PRINCE.—CHAUCER'S FIRST PENSION.

CHAP. XXVII.

Character of the Black Prince.

IN the beginning of the year 1363 the Black Prince settled as the feudatory lord, in the principality of Aquitaine [a]. He had already acquired a character which it falls to the lot of few to obtain. He was a soldier with the lustre of a sovereign; and he had the lustre of a sovereign, unexposed to the resentment, the misconstruction and the censures, usually attendant upon that elevated

[a] The writ conferring this dignity is in Rymer, Vol. VI, 36 Edw. 3, Jul. 19.

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rank. He had assisted in the battle of Cressy, and he had won the battle of Poitiers; two of the most considerable victories in modern times. History has scarcely fixed upon this elevated personage the shadow of a blemish. He was brave, but deliberate; he was enterprising, but sagacious and prudent. He was generous and humane, yet without weakness; he was proud, yet without insolence or cruelty. His contemporaries have been lavish in his praise, but he had no enemies; and, if the narrators of his actions have imputed to him any failure, they have ingenuously and unequivocally stated that it was to be ascribed to the urgency of his situation and unavoidable circumstances, and have fully acquitted him of errors of the heart. Never was man more free from every species of excess; never was man more liberal, frank, well-tempered and kind.

1361. His marriage.

This prince, after having secured his military renown in the battles above mentioned, and attained to the age of thirty-one years, became, about sixteen months before he took

up his residence in Aquitaine, a husband [b]. He had seen his two younger brothers married before him; and his parents and his country felt an anxiety that so illustrious, so accomplished and blameless a personage should leave behind him some inheritor of his blood and his virtues. He accordingly married a lady near of kin to the throne, daughter, and at length heiress, to Edmund earl of Kent, youngest son to Edward I. This lady, whose name was Joan, and who was known among her contemporaries by the appellation of the Fair Maid of Kent, married for her first husband sir Thomas Holland, in her right earl of Kent, and one of the founders of the order of the Garter. By him she had two sons, Thomas and John, distinguished persons in the court of Richard II; and she became a widow 26 December 1360 [c].

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At this time she was thirty-three years of age [c], a matron of great beauty, excellent un-

[b] Rymer, Vol. VI, 35 Edv. 3, Oct. 18. [c] Sandford, Book III, Chap. xi. Ashmole, Chap. XXV, Sect. iii, n. 14.

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derstanding and uncommon accomplishments. We shall have occasion repeatedly in the course of this history to notice her affectionate nature, the prudence of her counsels, and the graceful propriety of her conduct. It is related by one of the old chroniclers [d], that the Black Prince first addressed her in behalf of one to whom he was much attached; and that, after having urged her repeatedly on the subject, and shown himself not satisfied with her denials, she at length retorted upon him with much dignity, "that when she was under ward, she had submitted to be disposed of in marriage as those who had the superintendence of her conduct thought proper; but now, she was her own mistress, she remembered she was of the blood royal of England, and she would not cast herself away upon one beneath her; she was resolved therefore never to marry again, unless to a prince whose quality and virtues resembled his own." Prompted by this hint, he began

[d] Harding, apud Barnes, Book III, Chap. vii, §. 9.

his courtship; he admired her for her spirit and elevation of mind; and he felt in himself the beginning of a kindness, responsive to the ingenuous and noble partiality with which she regarded him. CHAP. XXVII. 1361.

Accompanied by this princess, and with Chandos (the most distinguished of all the warriors who fought under the standard of Edward III) for his prime minister[e], he passed over to Aquitaine, and fixed his residence in Bourdeaux, where he kept his court. His manners were so prepossessing and noble, and his fame in chivalry so splendid, that his court, in an age when chivalry was the reigning passion, could not fail to be a principal resort of all persons of generous minds and cultivated understandings. In about one year after his taking up his abode in Aquitaine, his princess bore him a son, who was named after himself Edward[f]. 1363. Settles in Aquitaine. 1364.

The court of the Black Prince, agreeably to His court.

[e] Froissart, Vol. I, Chap. ccxvi.

[f] Froissart, Chap. ccxviii.

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1364. the fashion of those days, was not only the resort of noblemen and warriors, but also of crowned heads. He numbered among his visitors Peter king of Cyprus, James king of Majorca and Charles king of Navarre[g]. In

1366. Visited by Peter king of Castille. the summer of 1366 a new and a memorable guest came to increase his glory, Peter king of Castille and Leon[h]. This king repaired to Bourdeaux as a suppliant; he had been driven from his dominions by a fierce and rapacious swarm of foreign outlaws, and he came to intreat the prince of Wales, as a warrior not less generous than brave, to redress the injuries he had suffered, and restore him to his throne.

Modern history of Spain. Spain was a country, in the dawn of modern European history, singularly interesting to all its neighbours. It had been entirely conquered by the Saracens about a century after the commencement of the Mahometan era; and these victorious enthusiasts, having

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[g] Froissart, Chap. ccxviii, ccxxxv. Thorn, A. D. 1366, apud X Scriptores.

[h] Froissart, Chap. ccxxxi.

overrun the half of France, were only checked in their career by the military prowess of Charles Martel in 732. In Spain they erected a caliphate; and the court of Cordova was for a long time one of the principal centres of Saracenic splendour and learning. The unfortunate Christians, as many of them as preferred independence to subjugation, took refuge in the mountains of the Asturias. Here, safe from the oppression of their insolent conquerors, they assumed courage by degrees, and sallied out upon the enemy. Disciplined by adversity and contention, they daily improved in hardiment, while their foes became enervated by luxury. The achievements of the Christian warriors in Spain are among the most extraordinary in the annals of mankind. They gradually gained ground upon the Saracens; and, in an unintermitted struggle of five centuries, redeemed the most considerable part of the peninsula from their yoke, and shut them up in a few of the southernmost provinces. Christian Spain then became divided into a variety of sovereignties; the kingdom of Asturias, of Leon, of

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Arragon, of Portugal and of Castille; each more eminent champion acquiring for himself an independent territory, and laying the foundation of a new dynasty. The smaller sovereignties however were gradually swallowed up in the greater; and the principal monarch of the peninsula, though styling himself king of Castille and Leon, might at this time with sufficient propriety have been styled king of Spain, there remaining of the Christian principalities which have since been annexed to the dominions of his descendants only the little kingdom of Arragon. Peter, the fugitive suppliant at the court of the Black Prince, was the lineal representative of St. Ferdinand, who about a century before had united in his own person the monarchies of Castille and Leon, and wrested from the Moors the opulent cities of Seville and Cordova.

Reign of Peter.

Peter, the prince with whose history we are at present concerned, had undoubtedly degenerated from the virtues of his ancestors. His adversaries charged him with having murdered his wife that he might marry his

mistress[i]; and it is certain that he was a slave to avarice, and practised a multitude of vexations upon his subjects that he might swell his treasures[k]. By the acts of which he was guilty, and in some degree by the artifice of the dynasty which finally superseded him in the throne, he has acquired the odious appellation of Peter the Cruel. Encouraged by the unpopularity of his administration, his natural brother, Henry of Transtamare, aspired to the crown. One of the circumstances which occurred in the growing animosity of the possessor of, and the aspirant to, the crown, deserves to be mentioned as an evidence of the barbarous manners then prevailing in Spain, and so far serving as an extenuation of some acts of Peter; which, though revolting to us, were seen with less aggravation by his contemporaries. Henry,

Ambitious views of Henry of Transtamare.

[i] The queen was unfaithful to his bed, and one of the present noble families of Spain boasts of being the issue of his illicit amours. Voltaire, Histoire Générale, Chap. LXV.

[k] Memoires de Du Guesclin, Chap. xiv. xv, apud Collection Universelle.

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instigated as it is said by the grandees of Castille, undertook to expostulate with the king upon the impropriety of some of his measures; he expressed himself with warmth; and one of the counsellors of Peter, who happened to be present, came forward to vindicate the conduct of his master. The bastard grew exasperated at this opposition, drew his dagger, and laid the minister dead at the feet of his sovereign. For this conduct he was obliged to fly from court, and took refuge in the neighbouring kingdom of Arragon. The king of Arragon received him with much kindness, and (as the historian with perfect *naïveté* goes on to assure us) was astonished to find, from Henry's narration, "that Peter persecuted him, and obliged him to fly his country, for having taken the liberty to represent to him the horror which every one felt at his repeated acts of cruelty[1]."

Goes into exile.

His cabals.

Henry was now more earnest than ever to take the place of his brother on the throne

[1] Mémoires de Du Guesclin, Chap. xx.

of Castille. He practised with the king of Arragon; he gained the support of Charles V. king of France; and he prevailed upon the pope to excommunicate and pronounce a sentence of deposition against Peter[m]. The times were favourable to his enterprise. The long wars between France and England, left at their conclusion a multitude of military adventurers in the former of these kingdoms, indisposed to every other occupation, and having no longer a legitimate opportunity for exercising that to which they were accustomed. These men refused all the laws of subordination, and subsisted by acts of plunder. The king of France therefore willingly entered into the scheme of drawing them off upon an expedition into Spain; and, to cover his real purpose, it was given out that the object was a crusade against the Moors of Grenada[n]. The Black Prince became the dupe of this pretence, and piously

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[m] Froissart, Chap. ccxxx.

[n] Froissart, ubi supra. Mémoires de Du Guesclin, Chap. xxi.

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encouraged the individuals among these outlaws, who had served under him, or were natives of England or Aquitaine, to engage in the expedition, which was headed by the celebrated adventurer Bertrand du Guesclin. The undertaking was successful; Peter was taken by surprise; and, after a short struggle, was obliged to seek his safety in flight. He first endeavoured to engage the king of Portugal to espouse his cause[a]; and, being repulsed there, he immediately resorted to the court of the Black Prince at Bourdeaux.

1366. Obtains the crown.

Favourable reception of Peter at Bourdeaux.

This renowned hero felt as the heir of one of the first monarchies in Europe might be expected to feel. If Peter had been expelled by the resentment and concerted revolt of his countrymen, it may be believed that Edward, full of the high notions he derived from his illustrious ancestry, would have decided that kings are not to be arraigned at the bar of their rebellious subjects, and would have condemned their insolence. But that a

[a] Mémoires de Du Guesclin, Chap. xix.

king should be driven from his dominions, not by the provoked insurrection of the nation he governed, but by the venal hostility of foreigners the burthen and scourge of their native soil, he regarded as an example odious and intolerable. He also felt with double fervour in the present case, as he had unintentionally been made an instrument in the mischievous enterprise. CHAP. XXVII. 1366.

Under the prejudices of chivalry, to restore a lawful king to his throne, and to expel a body of unprincipled adventurers who had spread like locusts over his country, was one of the most glorious enterprises in which a great military leader could engage. The war in which Edward had already so illustriously signalised himself was of a doubtful character; it was a contention between, let us say, two equal pretenders to a throne. It was not so much; Edward had been compelled by the force of truth repeatedly to acknowledge John for a king, and thus to condemn the cause in which he fought. To vindicate right, to assist the oppressed, and to beat Views of the Black Prince.

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down the boasts of successful wrong, the offices to which he was now invited, were the favourite pursuits of chivalry. Thus allured, he thought not of the actions and dispositions of Peter; he saw in him nothing but his illustrious ancestry, the splendour of the throne to which he was born, and the inheritor of that throne an unhappy fugitive, partly through the error of the man to whom he now sued for relief.

Undertakes the restoration of Peter.

Influenced by these considerations, the Black Prince gave a favourable and cordial reception to the exiled monarch, and immediately sent to consult his father upon the propriety of an expedition to redress his wrong. Edward III, who had the magnanimity to contemplate the rising fame of a dutiful and affectionate son without envy, desired nothing more than to see his reputation increased by the successful execution of so generous an enterprise. He therefore immediately returned an answer to that effect, and sent the duke of Lancaster to Bourdeaux to concert with his brother the detail of the

undertaking, and the extent of the supplies it would be necessary or practicable to draw from England [p]. CHAP. XXVII. 1367.

Preparations for the expedition were now made with great diligence, and the Black Prince began his march in the month of January [q]. He had no sooner been informed of the expulsion of Peter, than he peremptorily recalled as many of the French troops serving under Henry of Transtamare as he was entitled to influence [r]; and these soldiers, who understood that the Black Prince purposed to march into Castille, and who desired nothing more eagerly than to serve under their tried and honoured commander, were not less prompt to set out upon their march to Aquitaine, than he was strict to summon them. Du Guesclin, finding his ranks greatly thinned by this desertion, wintered in France [r], and, having recruited his army, took the Begins his march.

[p] Barnes, Book IV, Chap. i, §. 9.
[q] Froissart, Chap. ccxxxvi.
[r] Froissart, Chap. ccxxxiii.

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field in the ensuing spring with 120,000 men [s].

1367. Is joined by the duke of Lancaster.

The duke of Lancaster commanded the reinforcements from England; and, having joined his elder brother, they entered the

Passes the Pyrenees.

passes of the Pyrenees about the end of February [t]. In this march the Black Prince divided his army into three bands, and gave the command of the van to the duke of Lancaster [u]. The young duke had for his coadjutor lord Chandos, under whose eye, and assisted by whose talents and experience, it was reasonable to believe that he would make great proficiency in the art of slaughter, an art at this time valued and prized above all others. In their march they were aided by the compulsory alliance of the king of Navarre; and, their enterprise being thus facilitated, they passed in safety the valley of Roncesvalles, famed for the fabulous exploits of Roland, or Orlando,

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[s] Barnes, Chap. ii, §. 11.

[t] Froissart, Chap. ccxxxvi, ccxxxvii.

[u] Froissart, Chap. ccxxxvii.

When Charlemagne with all his peerage fell CHAP. XXVII.
By Fontarabia.

PARADISE LOST, Book I, ver. 586. 1367.

At sight of this spot no doubt their hearts panted with hope, with awe and emulation; and the younger knights in particular felt their circulation augmented, with a sense of the proud career in which they were engaged, and a thirst for immortality.

Enters the kingdom of Castille.

After some pause in the fertile plains of Navarre, the Black Prince crossed the Ebro, and entered the territory of Old Castille. The situation in which he soon found himself here was similar to that in which he had been placed at the battle of Poitiers, and to that of his father at the victory of Cressy. He had advanced into an enemy's country, was cut off from all supply, and reduced to the greatest extremity[x]; and, had the enemy exerted the sagacity and resolution to close him round, to harass him with petty attacks,

[x] Mémoires de Du Guesclin, Chap. XXII.

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and abstain from a general action, his expedition must have ended in complete discomfiture. This temerity however was in some degree the necessary consequence of the state of the European powers in this age, whose resources were speedily exhausted, and whose soldiers were for the most part engaged for a very short period. And, allowance having been made for their apparent rashness in the onset, both he and his father, in the instances alluded to, will be found to have conducted themselves in the conclusion of the enterprise with singular prudence, coolness, ability and heroism.

Battle of Najara.

The fate of the campaign for the restoration of the exiled king was decided by a battle fought on the third of April near Najara a town on the Ebro[y]. The Spanish usurper was encouraged to try the event of a battle, by the fortuitous success which had attended him in a partial conflict, about a

[y] Froissart, Chap. ccxli. Memoires de Du Guesclin, Chap. XXIII.

fortnight before [t]. The duke of Lancaster had still the command of one of the divisions of the English army, and had still with him lord Chandos as his Mentor and guide, who had before officiated in the same character to the Black Prince. A moment before the battle was joined, John of Gaunt said, turning to one of the sons of the earl of Warwick who was near him, Sir William, there is the enemy; you shall see me to-day prove myself a true knight, or you shall see me lost in the attempt. Their wing of the army seems to have had no mean share in the action, as they were opposed to Du Guesclin, and the French soldiers of fortune, who had placed the bastard upon the throne. The Spaniards, who formed the main body of the enemy, though enrolled from an heroic nation, were for the most part new recruits, and by no means equal to the Gallic veterans. It is also probable that they did not

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[t] Froissart, Chap. ccxxxix. Memoires de Du Guesclin, Chap. XXII.

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engage with perfect alacrity, nor feel themselves perfectly satisfied to cooperate with a gang of foreign freebooters the rudeness of whose manners they had by this time sufficiently witnessed, to place an usurper upon the throne of their lawful sovereign. The battle however was on the whole contested with considerable obstinacy; but ended in the total defeat of Henry, with the capture of his commander in chief and of the most distinguished officers among his French allies. The gallantry of the duke of Lancaster in this action was much celebrated; and it was his division of the army that took Du Guesclin prisoner, who, according to the customs of that age, became the property of Chandos, and was afterward redeemed for a ransom of one hundred thousand franks [a].

Feelings with which the news of this victory were received in England.

The rejoicings in England on account of the victory of Najara were singularly great. The city of London was adorned in various parts with triumphal arches; the fronts of

[a] Froissart, Chap. ccxliv.

the houses in the principal avenues were covered with tapestry; and the citizens feasted every guest who chose to resort to their plentiful tables, in the streets [b]. After the great achievements which had of late years been accomplished in France, it was thought the consummation of glory to this country, that the sons of her king should thus become the good geniuses of Europe, raising the prostrate, subduing rebellion, delivering one of her noblest countries from the yoke of a lawless banditti, and replacing a rightful sovereign on the throne of his heroic ancestors.

Unfortunate issue of the expedition.

The issue of the campaign however was eminently unfortunate for the nation which thus exulted in its apparent success. The battle of Najara was indeed decisive of the fate of war. The Castillians, who had never entered heartily into the rebellion against Peter, promptly and willingly returned to their duty. The bastard Henry immediately

[b] Barnes, Chap. ii, §. 19. Stow, Survey of London: of watches.

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took to flight, sheltering himself first in Aragon, and afterward in France. Every thing seemed to bear the most prosperous aspect, except to the generous mediators by whose interference the whole revolution had been effected.

Hypocritical behaviour of the restored sovereign.

The character of Peter, whatever might be its merits in other respects, was certainly in an eminent degree disfigured with the vices of avarice, ingratitude, and bad faith. In these points he bore a considerable resemblance to his successor in the close of the fifteenth century, Ferdinand the Catholic; who, celebrated as he has been by venal or depraved historians for sagacity and wisdom, knew no other policy than craft, possessed no other superiority over his neighbours than coldness of heart, and placed his infamous vanity in trifling with the most sacred engagements, and overreaching and making a dupe of ingenuous credulity [c].

Previously to the expedition into Spain,

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[c] Hume, Chap. XXVII.

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the Black Prince had represented to Peter in the most unequivocal manner the inability under which he laboured, in the existing state of his finances, to sustain the expence of such a preparation. Peter in reply undertook amply to remunerate the captains and soldiers who enlisted in the war, if ever he should be restored to the throne of Castille; and with this engagement the prince was satisfied. The whole being thus adjusted, the prince and the king of Castille represented to the different knights and lords who were preparing to march, the urgency of the case, and intreated them, by mortgages, or whatever other means occurred to them, to provide for their present expenditure; the prince pledging himself for the king of Castille that he would see them faithfully repaid[d].

No sooner did Peter behold the object of the enterprise completed, the army of his enemies totally routed, their general a prisoner, and the pretender in banishment, than

[d] Froissart, Chap. ccxxxii, ccxxxiii,

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he resolved to evade his engagements, and send away his deliverer baffled and disappointed. He regarded however with no less fear than repugnance, the hero to whom he was indebted for every thing that he possessed. He meditated therefore how most effectually to cajole and delude his generous ally. He was the first to mention the pecuniary obligations under which he was placed. He represented that it was impossible to raise so large a sum as was justly due to his allies, without his own personal interference and importunity. Seville was the most distant of the considerable towns in his dominions, and he held out this as the place upon which, for its opulence, his hopes of acquitting himself were placed. After having resided with his benefactor for three weeks in Burgos, his capital, he recommended to him to conduct his army to the vicinity of Valladolid, being probably secretly led to this preference by the greater insalubrity of the climate; and promised to return with all possible expedition, bringing with him the

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treasures which would be necessary to redeem his engagements [e].

Sickness of the English army.

The Black Prince demeaned himself with all possible honour to his treacherous ally, and, judging of the intentions of Peter from the liberality of his own heart, waited a considerable time with the most unsuspecting patience. Peter however took no steps toward the acquittal of his debt; and, if he extorted money from his subjects, it was with no view of remitting a pistole of it to the English commander. Here on the contrary he suffered him to languish during the unwholesome months of June, July and August [f], when in this climate the atmosphere during the day is sultry, stagnant and insufferable, and in the night the traveller often shivers with cold. If the troops had been in motion, the effect of the season would probably have been less fatal to them. When the body is in exercise, the mind alert, and the

[e] Froissart, Chap. ccxlii. Memoires de Du Guesclin, Chap. XXIV.

[f] Froissart, Chap. ccxliii.

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scene continually changing, there is a principle in the constitution of man which enables it to throw off many inconveniences. But the army of the Black Prince was in the worst species of inaction, that stagnant and sickly condition of the soul which is produced by tedious, monotonous and fruitless expectation. Add to this, they were ill supplied with the conveniences and necessaries of life. Accordingly, if their commander, irritated at the base treatment he had sustained, had felt disposed to extort by force what ought to have been paid him with readiness and gratitude, his army would have been found too feeble to second his resentment. This his insidious ally perfectly knew; and he felt a diabolical joy in witnessing the triumph of craft and falshood over integrity, ingenuousness and honour.

Malady of the Black Prince.

But what was worse than all the rest, the Black Prince, when he retired out of Spain, carried with him the ruins only of a shattered constitution. He had probably urged his corporeal strength too far in his preceding campaigns. The climate of the heart of

Spain in its hottest months completed his destruction. It was indeed principally the vexation of his mind at witnessing the unworthiness of the man he had served, that laid him naked as it were to all the hostility of the season. The more chivalrous and disinterested was the enterprise he undertook, the less could he endure to see it leading in its sequel to the indulgence of the basest passions of the human heart. Thus did one of the purest and most exalted of human characters according to the mode of the age in which he lived, fall a prey to a wretch of the narrowest and most sordid views, and who was stupid enough to pride himself in the base ascendancy which he thus obtained. Edward survived his expedition into Spain almost nine years; but, instead of gradually shaking off the fatal effects it left behind, he continually became more listless, languid and debilitated, till at last his spark of life was extinguished by an almost imperceptible decay.

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From the records that at present exist, the time cannot be precisely ascertained at which

John of Gaunt knight of the Garter.

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John of Gaunt was elected into his father's newly instituted corps of knights companions of the order of the Garter. The name of Lionel duke of Clarence appears however, together with that of John duke of Lancaster, among those who were first substituted in the room of the original founders[g]; and, as these two princes were nearly of an age, and received the honours of knighthood and the title of duke together, it is highly probable that the ensigns of the Garter were conferred upon them at the same time; which must therefore have been before the month of October 1368, when the duke of Clarence died[h], and probably before the month of May in that year[i], when he set out upon a journey to Italy from which he never returned.

Duke of Clarence dies.

Chaucer's first pension.

It is during the period of the duke of Lancaster's absence in the Spanish war, that the first official notice occurs, in our records, of

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[g] Ashmole, Chap. XXVI, Sect. iv.

[h] Sandford, Book III, Chap. xii.

[i] Rymer, Tom. VI, 42 E. 3, May 10.

the name of Chaucer. On the twentieth of June in this year he obtained an annual pension of twenty marks, for services performed and to be performed, granted to him for life, or till the king should otherwise dispose of him [k]. CHAP. XXVII. 1367.

It is reasonable to pause here for an instant to consider the value of this pension. This will be sufficiently illustrated by the adjustment of two questions; first, the quantity of silver expressed by the words used in the grant, twenty marks; and secondly, a general comparison of the price of provisions and the necessaries of life, as they stood in the time of Chaucer, with the price which they bear at present. I will take for my guides in this calculation, bishop Fleetwood's work, entitled Chronicon Preciosum, and sir George Shuckburgh Evelyn's Table exhibiting the prices of various necessaries of life from the year 1050, printed in the Philosophical Transactions for the Year 1798. Its value.

[k] Appendix, No. V.

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According to the first of these authors, a pound-weight of silver continued from the year 1353 to the year 1421 to be coined into twenty-five shillings, and began in the year 1603 to be coined into sixty-two shillings, as at present. Hence it follows, that the person who received, during the first of these intervals, the sum of money called a mark (thirteen shillings and four pence of that time), actually received a weight of silver, which under the denomination of money has now for two centuries amounted to thirty-three shillings nearly.

By sir George Shuckburgh Evelyn's Table it further appears that the average price of the various necessaries of life in 1350, compared with the estimated average price in 1800, is in the proportion of 77 to 562. The result then of this statement is, that the sum, at the first of these periods denominated a mark, or thirty-three shillings of our money, ought to be considered as equivalent, for the ordinary purposes of life, to about £. 12 of the present time. In other words, the money of the period of Chaucer,

taking in the joint consideration of weight of silver and price of provisions, was equal to about eighteen times the money of the same denomination in our own age. Chaucer's pension therefore of twenty marks will be properly represented to our apprehension, by a revenue of £. 240 *per annum*. CHAP. XXVII. 1367.

It may be instructive to add here a few examples of the gratuities bestowed by Edward III. upon persons of different classes and professions in society, for the purpose of illustrating the degree of estimation which it was the habit of these times to annex to such classes or professions. We find him granting in the year 1345 the sum of sixpence *per diem* for life to a certain apothecary [*apothecarius*], who had attended him in a dangerous illness during an expedition into Scotland[l]; and, some years before, a pension to the court-physician of £. 100 *per annum*[m]. To a person who had brought to him the Illustrations.

[l] Rymer, Tom. V, 19 Edv. 3, Oct. 8.
[m] Ditto, Tom. IV, 1 Edv. 3, Mar. 10.

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first news of the victory at Neville's Cross, he granted one hundred shillings *per annum* for life[n]; and to another, on the ground of having first carried the intelligence to the council at London, a gratuity of £. 10[o]. The sum of forty marks *per annum* was given by the king to the man who brought him intelligence of the birth of his eldest son; £. 10 *per annum* as a provision for his nurse; and ten marks *per annum* to his rocker[p]. One hundred shillings is the amount of the annuity, granted to a lady supposed to have been afterward the wife of Chaucer, the cause in consideration of which it was granted being that she had been one of the maids of honour [*domicellæ*] to the queen: the grant bears date a few months after the queen's decease[q]: the pension of the same date, granted to the maids of honour of the highest class is ten marks[r]. The salaries of

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[n] Ditto, Tom. V. 21 Edv. 3, Mar. 10.

[o] Ditto, 20 Edv. 3, Dec. 12.

[p] Ashmole, Chap. XXVI, Sect. iii.

[q] Appendix, No.

the judges, as we have seen, were about forty marks[r]: but there is reason to think that they had certain perquisites and boons, which tended considerably to increase the gross amount of their revenue; this may be regarded as pretty strongly corroborated to us by a line of Chaucer formerly quoted:

The judgé dremeth how his plees be spedde[s].

Each of the dreamers mentioned in this passage of Chaucer, dreams of the thing about which he was anxious when awake, and fancies that it turns out in the manner that he then wished: the judge therefore would certainly not have found a place in this enumeration were it not that his emoluments depended either upon the number of the causes he tried, or upon the way in which he decided them.

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[r] Chap. XVIII, p. 67.

[s] Parliament of Birds,' ver. 101. See Chap. XXI, p. 174.

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Montagu, afterward earl of Salisbury, for his services in the overthrow of Roger Mortimer, was rewarded with an income of £. 1000 *per annum* [t]; and, some years after, his younger brother, sir Edward Montagu had a grant of a pension of £. 100 *per annum* [t]. The annuity granted to Robert of Artois, first instigator of the wars of Edward III. for the crown of France, was of the amount of twelve hundred marks [u]. The king likewise conferred a pension of £. 1500 *per annum* upon the duke of Brabant for life [x]; and the pension of Baliol, subsequently to his surrender of all his claims upon the crown of Scotland, was £. 2000 [y]. This was also the amount of the allowance settled upon Joan, wife to David Bruce the reigning king of Scotland, and sister to Edward III [z]. The

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[t] Collins, Peerage of England: duke of Manchester.

[u] Rymer, Tom. IV, 11 Edv. 3, May 5.

[x] Ditto, Tom. 5, 13 Edv. 3, Dec. 28.

[y] Ditto, Tom. VI, 31 Edv. 3, Feb. 4.

[z] Rymer, Tom. IV, 2 Edv. 3, May 1.

income of Philippa queen of England was £. 15000 *per annum*[a]. In the writ conveying to John of Gaunt a certain portion of duke Henry's inheritance, which had been reserved till one of the daughters, coheiresses, should have issue, the value of the lands hereby assigned, independently of the property which had fallen to him at the death of his father-in-law (and the other part of

[a] Rymer, Tom. IV. 2 Edv. 3, May 5. The sum here put down is undoubtedly too high, but it is perhaps impossible to ascertain the exact value of these grants. The word in the instrument of dower, both to Joan and Philippa, answering to £, is not *libra*, but *librata terræ & redditus*. This term is explained by Spelman as equivalent to an acre; and an acre of land, according to Fleetwood, was worth at this time on an average three pence *per annum* (Chronic on Preciosum, Chap. IV). This would reduce the value of queen Philippa's income to £. 262 : 10 : — *per annum*, and of queen Joan's to £. 25 *per annum*. Cowel, on the contrary, rates the *denarius terræ* as an acre, and consequently the *libra*, or *librata terræ*, as two hundred and forty acres. This would raise queen Philippa's revenue to £. 63,000 per annum, £. 7000 above the revenue of the whole kingdom. Ducange, Glossarium, in voc. is inclined to consider the *librata terræ* as signifying so much land as would yield a revenue of £. 1 *per annum*; and Ducange's authority is followed in the text.

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which he took possession at the death of the duchess Matilda), is estimated at little less than £. 3000 *per annum* [b]. Lastly, the ransom of Bruce, husband to queen Joan, after eleven years imprisonment, during which he was constantly attended by the royal matron [c], was fixed at one hundred thousand marks [d]; and that of John king of France at three millions of crowns, each crown, by the conditions of treaty, to be equal to the fourth part of a mark, English money [e]. To complete our view of this subject, let us add that the ordinary revenue of the crown, from the time of Henry III [f]. to Henry V, a period of about two hundred years, appears from an authentic document, taken at the close of this period [g], to have been nearly £. 55,714 : 10 : 10 *per annum*.

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[b] Rot. Fin. 35 Edv. 3, m. 23, apud Collins, History of John of Gaunt.

[c] Hollinshed, Scotland, A. D. 1358.

[d] Rymer, Tom. VI, 31 Edv. 3, Oct. 3.

[e] Rymer, 34 Edv. 3, May 8.

[f] Hume, Chap. XIX.

[g] Rymer, Tom. X, 9 Hen. 5.

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The result of these documents, and of others which will hereafter be produced, tends to confirm us in the opinion, that the different ranks of society were treated with somewhat more inequality in Chaucer's time than at present. The pension granted to sir Edward Montagu the younger son of a noble family is of nearly eight times, and that granted to his elder brother seventy-five times, the amount of that bestowed upon Chaucer; while the salaries of the judges only double his annuity. The pension granted to lord Montagu, which, estimated according to the proportion above laid down, is worth £. 18,000 *per annum* of our money, and that to the titular king of Scots, worth £. 36,000, would undoubtedly in the present times be admitted to be princely; lord Montagu's was so much clear addition to his hereditary estate. The fragment of John of Gaunt's inheritance abovementioned, was equivalent to £. 54,000 *per annum* of our money. The disbursements of Thomas earl of Lancaster, great-uncle to the princess Blanche, for one year (the year 1313), are

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are stated to have amounted, on the score of his houshold establishment alone, to £. 7957 : 13 : 4 [h], making of our money £. 143,238 [i]. His wealth therefore must be supposed to have been at least equal to that of the late duke of Orleans, whose annual income was computed at £. 300,000 sterling. The whole revenue of the kingdom however, estimated according to the same rule, scarcely exceeded the present value of one million sterling. From these premises we may form some judgment, how formidable opponents the great barons of the realm must have been found, when they set themselves in hostility to the sovereign.

Thomas earl of Lancaster, the occupier of this immense wealth, was dissatisfied with his lot, and became the head of the barons who took advantage of the imbecility of Ed-

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[h] Stow, Survey of London: of orders and customs.

[i] This was erroneously stated in a former chapter (Chapter VII, p. 166), upon the authority of Anderson's History of Commerce. A similar misstatement occurs, Chap. XVIII, p. 68.

ward II. At length he was conveyed prisoner to his own castle of Pomfret; and, having been summarily adjudged to death, was placed upon a lean jade without a bridle, with a rusty and torn hat on his head, and thus conveyed, amidst the insults and peltings of a brutish multitude, to a hill without the town, where his head was struck off by the executioner[k]. Many miracles were afterward wrought at his tomb[l]; and he was nearly created a saint by the Roman pontiff. CHAP. XXVII. 1367.

It is sufficiently observable that this first court-favour of a pecuniary sort, which has come to our knowledge as having been conferred upon Chaucer, was granted during the absence of his patron, John of Gaunt, on the continent: he sailed from England in the beginning of January, and did not return till the decline of the year. Thus we have Edward III. himself, in the first page, as it were, of our official documents for the life Conclusion.

[k] Pakington, apud Leland, Collectanea, Tom. I, p. 669.

[l] Ditto, p. 670.

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of Chaucer, refuting the invidious insinuation of certain modern critics, that not he, but John of Gaunt, was the original patron and encourager of the singular talents and admirable genius of the father of English poetry.

The year, the events of which have formed the principal subject of this chapter, is rendered further remarkable by having given birth to two English sovereigns, Richard II. son of the Black Prince, and Henry IV. son and heir to John of Gaunt and the duchess Blanche.

CHAP. XXVIII.

WAR WITH FRANCE.—DUKE OF LANCASTER COMMANDS IN PICARDY.—DEATH OF THE DUCHESS BLANCHE.

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IT was the policy of Charles V. king of France, surnamed by his countrymen the Wise, that in 1369 disturbed the peace between the two crowns, so happily established by the treaty of Bretigni in 1360. The pretence for his conduct we shall presently have occasion to assign; the motive was the declining age of Edward III, and the infirm health of the Black Prince. It was natural that a king of France should seek the earliest opportunity to avenge the victories which those princes had gained in his dominions, and to recover the territories which the pressure of his affairs and the frowns of fortune

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had obliged his predecessor to yield in full sovereignty to his adversaries. It was with that contempt of the solemnity of oaths, the clear construction of obligations, and the sacredness of public engagements, which characterises the proceedings of the directors of nations, that Charles V. endeavoured to varnish his conduct.

1367. Critical situation of the Black Prince.

When the Black Prince returned to his government of Aquitaine, he brought back with him the army he had so successfully commanded in Spain; but, victorious as they had been, he brought them back abridged in their numbers, sickly, disheartened, impoverished, and destitute of almost all the necessaries of existence. Peter king of Castille, whom they had restored to his throne, had engaged amply to remunerate their services; but he had disdained even the appearance of making an exertion for that purpose. Edward, their commander, had made himself the security for Peter that they should be fully paid; and, the principal in the business having failed, the obligation seemed now to devolve upon the second. The attachment

which even the lawless regiments, who had proved themselves the scourge and terror of more peaceful scenes, had displayed to their gallant commander, was memorable: at his beck they had resorted to him from the standard of Du Guesclin; they had followed him, famished, hopeless, but unrepining, in his return out of Spain; and the Black Prince's subjects of Aquitaine having complained of the depredations to which their necessities compelled them, they at his command quitted his dominions, unpaid, and withdrew into the adjacent provinces of France [a]. Edward could not bear that they should be thus grievously injured by the services to which he had led them, and by the failure of engagements of which he had been the surety.

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In this emergency the bishop of Rodez, chancellor of Aquitaine, urged the prince to impose a tax upon his French subjects, under the name of hearth-money, of one livre *per*

Hearth-money.

[a] Froissart, Chap. ccxliv.

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hearth, which it was computed would yield an annual sum of one million two hundred thousand livres. Chandos, constable of the duchy, the most virtuous as well as the most gallant of the soldiers of the prince, is said to have opposed this advice; either because he thought the prosperity of the peaceful subject a matter of higher consideration than the providing for these bands of adventurers, or that he foresaw the fatal consequences to which this policy would lead. The prince however persisted, and the tax was solemnly proposed to the states of the different provinces within his government [b].

Taxation was a measure, in these early times, of comparatively rare and novel practice. It was inconsistent with the original and genuine spirit of the feudal system. That system sufficiently provided for the expences of the first magistrate by his hereditary demesnes, by the prescribed contributions annexed to the great feudal incidents, and by

[b] Froissart, ubi supra.

the established and unremunerated services to be rendered in war by the holders of knight's fees and baronages. In proportion as the feudal system declined, these resources became inadequate. There was consequently a crisis in government in Europe, between the destruction of the feudal provisions, and the rise of the more modern method of taxation. The recollection of this will serve as a clue to many of the political transactions of the fourteenth and following centuries. CHAP. XXVIII. 1368.

The proposition of the hearth-money was variously received in the different states or parliaments of the English provinces in France. By the lower classes it was viewed as an insupportable incumbrance. Among the lords and holders of feudal estates various cabals were formed against it. It is observed, that in the districts nearest to Bourdeaux, the seat of government, and where the influence of the popular manners of the Black Prince was most sensibly felt, it met with scarcely any opposition; while in the remoter parts, where there was less opportunity for the growth of this sentiment of personal attach- Discontents in Aquitaine.

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ment, and where therefore the inhabitants retained with less adulteration the genuine character of Frenchmen, it was ordinarily regarded with antipathy and abhorrence [c]. In a general assembly of the provinces of the prince's government held at Niort, several of the lords of Gascony remonstrated forcibly against the measure, and at length withdrew in discontent; their principal leaders shortly after resorting as refugees to Paris, to the court of Charles V [d].

Secession of certain of the French barons.

Various causes, as always happens in similar cases, co-operated to swell the tide of disaffection which now manifested itself against the English government. However popular were the manners of the prince of Wales, however equitable his temper and generous his sentiments, he found it impossible to satisfy all in a nation of men born the subjects of his natural enemy. Many of the nobles were suspicious; they saw, or thought they saw, themselves slighted, and others pre-

[c] Froissart, Chap. ccxlvi. [d] Ditto, Chap. ccxliv.

ferred before them; and they began to cast looks of impatience and affection toward the young monarch of the realm of France, the reputation of whose government became every day more grave and imposing. CHAP. XXVIII. 1368.

It is extremely probable that this monarch had secretly from the first fomented these discontents; it is certain that he contemplated the appearance of the refugees at his court with undisguised pleasure. Meanwhile he affected an extreme reluctance to come to extremities with his "dear nephew," the prince of Wales, and seemed finally to be prevailed upon only by the importunities of the malcontents to take part in their grievances [e]. At length however, in January 1369, he dispatched a summons to the Black Prince, under the style of prince of Wales and Aquitaine, to appear before him as his sovereign lord, to answer certain complaints of his vassals [f]. Black Prince summoned by Charles V. to answer the complaints of his vassals. 1369.

This could amount to nothing less than a

[e] Froissart, ubi supra. [f] Ditto, Chap. ccxlvii.

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declaration of war. By the treaty of Bretigni it was solemnly stipulated that France should renounce for ever all claim of sovereignty over the territories ceded to the English. Nothing therefore could be more audacious and unprincipled, when tried by the dictates of morality, than the proceeding of Charles V. His plea, so far as he condescended to colour his measures with the technicalities of justice, appears to have been that, though the treaty of Bretigni had now been concluded more than eight years, the stipulated renunciations had never been executed [s]. Yet this circumstance had been solely caused by his artificial delays. Edward III, confident in the high and merited reputation of himself and his son, entertained not the slightest suspicion of the new king of France, and did not allow himself to imagine that the French monarchy which had repeatedly been humbled at his feet, would ever dare willingly to unfurl its banners against him.

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[s] Froissart, Chap. ccxlvi.

Intelligence of the hostile and insulting proceedings of Charles V. being brought to the court of London, Edward III, by the advice of his parliament, resumed the stile of king of France, and began vigorously to prepare for war[h]. He saw that he had been deceived in relying upon the terror of his arms flowing from the past, and that he must now contend afresh for the monuments of his glory and the acquisitions of his prowess. Reasoning perhaps on chivalrous principles, he disdained to measure himself with the youthful tenant of the throne of France; and, while he appeared copious in measures of precaution and defence, he left the active direction of the campaign to his sons. Charles V. on the other hand had nothing of the spirit of chivalry: he contented himself with the wisdom of the cabinet, and never once during his reign appeared at the head of his armies. In the present instance he threatened the British dominions with an invasion,

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1369. War.

[h] Rymer, Tom. VI, 43 Edv. 3, June 3.

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and obliged Edward III. to adopt measures of prevention on the side both of Scotland [i] and Ireland [k]; at the same time that, having gained intelligence of the defenceless state of the English possessions in Picardy, he pushed forward a strong and rapid body of troops, and seized upon Abbeville, St. Valori and Crotoy, before Edward III. could take the proper steps for their relief [l].

Duke of Lancaster commands in Picardy.

At length the duke of Lancaster, with a small but select army, sailed from Dover, and by his appearance at Calais, put an end to the real or ostensible preparations for invading the dominions of England. The duke of Burgundy, brother to the king of France, and intended admiral of his fleet, marched from Harfleur, its rendezvous, to watch and counteract the motions of the English general. The principal companion of the duke of Lancaster in this expedition was the illustrious sir Walter Manny, one of the original

[i] Froissart, Chap. cclii.

[k] Dugdale, Vol. II, art. Fauconberg.

[l] Froissart, Chap. cclii.

founders of the order of the Garter, and a gallant and most distinguished coadjutor of Edward III. in all his expeditions into France [m].

CHAP. XXVIII. 1369.

Here were displayed the first symptoms of the military system of Charles V. Indifferent to the brilliant scenes of actual service in which he took no part, he fixed a stern and stedfast eye upon consequences and results. The maxims of war then fashionable were calculated to incite him to signalise the first campaign of his reign by some memorable achievement. The French army is said by seven times to have outnumbered the forces of the duke of Lancaster [n]; and therefore to the ardent and enterprising spirit of a young man it would have appeared as if they had it in their power to trample down and annihilate the English by a single effort. But the king of France thought otherwise. He remembered the discomfitures of Cressy

Cautious system of the French monarch.

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[m] Froissart, Chap. cclxvii, cclxix.

[n] Ditto, Chap. cclxix.

CHAP. XXVIII.

1369.

and Poitiers; and he knew that the present commander of the enemy burned with the most painful desire to place his name upon the same scroll with those of his father and his brother. Charles V. saw that the inhabitants of Picardy and Aquitaine earnestly desired to return under the sway of their native sovereign; and he was convinced that nothing could tend more strongly to that purpose, than his carefully providing for them time and opportunities for that purpose, and wasting the strength of the adversary in inactive campaigns. Like Fabius, he aimed by procrastination and delay to win back the conquests of the British Hannibal. Accordingly, his peremptory instructions to his brother were, by no consideration to be drawn into a general action [a]. The English and French armies therefore faced each other from day to day, without proceeding any further than to mutual ostentation and menace.

Fable of the monkish historian.

An idle and ridiculous story is here intro-

[a] Froissart, ubi supra.

duced by the monkish historian, which is entitled to be noticed, as affording a clue to explain many subsequent parts of the history. He states that, while the two armies thus spent their time in inaction, Thomas Beauchamp earl of Warwick, with a small number of followers, suddenly came over from England, and expressed great indignation at the dastardly conduct of his countrymen. He said, that his companions should not have time to digest the first bread they ate in France, before they gained some signal trophy from the opposite party. The valiant earl however was disappointed. The French army no sooner heard of the arrival of this wonder-working knight, than they struck their tents with dismay, and fled with the utmost precipitation; so that, when the new comer went out after dinner for the accomplishment of his promise, he found nothing on every side but solitude and silence [p].

CHAP. XXVIII. 1369.

Seldom has the history of any eminent

[p] Walsingham, ad ann.

CHAP. XXVIII.

1369.

character been more atrociously misrepresented than that of John of Gaunt; and accordingly we find those who have pretended to record it, endeavouring to fasten disgrace upon it in the first page, as it were, of the series. We shall have abundant occasion in the sequel to detect their falshoods, and to expose the motives in which they originated.

Campaign in the south.

The Black Prince achieved nothing memorable in this campaign. The principal exertions on the side of the French were directed against Aquitaine; but such was the vigilance of the prince, and his illustrious coadjutor, lord Chandos, that they gained no substantial success, and, notwithstanding the advantage in point of time which they derived from their perfidy, the posture of the English affairs in the south was not less favourable at the close of the campaign, than it had been before the commencement of the war.

Death of queen Philippa.

If the year 1369 was marked with no trophies of great military success against us, it was not however undistinguished by domestic and private calamities. Queen Philippa,

CHAP. XXVIII.

whose merits have been already described, expired on the fifteenth of August [q]; and Blanche, the consort of John of Gaunt, toward the close of the year [r]. The celebrated Chandos, the most illustrious of all the military subjects of Edward III, fell obscurely in an accidental rencounter with a small party of French, before the commencement of the ensuing campaign [s].

1369. of the duchess of Lancaster. of lord Chandos.

[q] Walsingham, ad ann.
[r] Walsingham, Ypodigma Neustriæ, ad ann.
[s] Froissart, Chap. cclxxvii.

CHAP. XXIX.

CHAUCER'S POEM ENTITLED THE BOOK OF THE DUCHESS.—HIS MARRIAGE.

CHAP. XXIX.

1369.

Plan of the poem.

ON occasion of the death of the duchess Blanche, Chaucer produced an epicedium, or funeral poem, entitled the Book of the Duchess. The plan of this poem is chiefly historical, and many passages of it have already been inserted in our narrative of the courtship of John of Gaunt with the heiress of Lancaster. It is however given in the form of a vision; and is beautifully prefaced with a recital of the pathetic tale of Ceyx and Alcyone, from the eleventh book of Ovid's Metamorphoses, which Chaucer feigns himself to have read immediately before he fell asleep. A parallel is thus silently produced between the untimely fate of Ceyx

Ceyx and Alcyone.

who was shipwrecked, and of Blanche, who died in the flower of her life, being under thirty years of age; as well as between the exemplary conjugal affection and sorrow of Alcyone, and the anguish excited in the breast of John of Gaunt for the loss of his duchess. CHAP. XXIX. 1369.

Having perused this tale of the Roman poet, Chaucer falls asleep; but, though sleeping, recollects the preceding circumstances, and considers himself as in bed. He dreams that he is roused from his slumbers by the blowing of a horn, the trampling of horses, and the confused voices of men, preparing for a great hunt. Chaucer rises to join in the chace, and finds that it is the hunting of the emperor Octonyen, or Octavien, the hero of one of the romances of chivalry [a]. The hunt lasts a long time: it being over, Chaucer wanders from the rest of the company; and, following a whelp, who comes up to Vision of Chaucer.

[a] Percy on Ancient Metrical Romances, No. 19, apud Reliques, Vol. III.

CHAP. XXIX. 1369.

him unexpectedly, and fawns upon him with the familiarity of an old acquaintance, he is led, through a beautiful valley, enamelled with flowers, adorned with trees, and peopled with all kinds of gay and sportive animals, to a large oak, at the foot of which is seated a knight, of noble appearance, clothed in black, and seemingly immersed in disconsolate and melancholy contemplations. This knight is John of Gaunt. In a little while, though Chaucer represents himself as wholly a stranger to the knight, they enter into conversation. That they have no previous acquaintance, is apparently feigned, that the illustrious mourner may with the greater probability and propriety enter into the history of his sorrows.

Affliction of John of Gaunt.

Chaucer dwells emphatically and elaborately upon the depth of his friend's sufferings and anguish. While as yet he had only remarked him unobserved, Chaucer exclaims,

It was grete wonder that nature
Might suffre any créature
To have soche sorow', and he not ded.

ver. 467.

And Gaunt, venting his anguish in soliloquy, is made to say,

Alas, o dethe! what eyleth the,
That thou [b] n'oldest have taken me,
Whan that thou toke my lady swete?

ver. 481.

When he had uttered his complaint, his spirits seemed suddenly to fail him, and his blood retreated to his heart;

and that made al
His hewé chaunge, and [c] wexen grene
And pale.

ver. 496.

Chaucer accosts, and expresses a wish to console, him; for which the knight courteously thanks the poet, but adds,

No man ne may my sorwe glade,
That mak'th my hewe to fal and fade,
And hath myn understanding [d] lorne,
That me is wo, that I was borne.
. . . . . .

---

[b] wouldest not. [c] wax. [d] lost, destroyed.

CHAP. XXIX.

1369.

Me's wo, that I live hourés twelve!
And who so wol assaye him selve,
Whether his hert can have pité
Of any sorowe', let him se me;
I wretche, that dethe hath made al naked
Of al the blisse that [e] er was maked;
I wretche, the wersté of al wightes,
That hate my dayés, and my nightes;
My lyfe, my [f] lustés, be my [g] lothe:

. . . . . .

And this is paine withouten [h] rede,
Alway dyinge, and be not dede;
That Sisyphus that lyeth in hel
Ne may not of more sorowe tel.

ver. 563.

After many exclamations of this disconsolate nature, the hero at length grows more composed, and, to gratify the curiosity of the poet, enters into the history of his loves. He describes the person and accomplishments of Blanche, the coyness and modesty with which she received his courtship, her slow

---

[e] ever. [f] wishes. [g] aversion.
[h] uncertainty, doubt.

and timorous consent, and the happy nuptials with which his wishes were ultimately crowned. He expatiates with enthusiasm upon the felicity of his marriage state. Many of these passages have been already quoted. The poem then draws to a conclusion.

CHAP. XXIX. 1369.

Sir, [i] quod I, and where is she now?
Now, [i] quod he, and [k] ystinte anone,
Therwith he woxe as dedde as stone,
And saied, Alas, that I was bore!
That was the losse, that here before
I toldé the that I hadde lorne.
Bethinke the how I saied beforne,
"Thou [l] woste full litel what thou menest,
For I have loste more then thou wenest."
God wot, alas! right that was She!
Alas, sir, how? what maie that be?—
She is dedde!—Naie!—Yes, by my trouthe.—
Is that your losse? By God, 'tis [m] routhe!

ver. 1298.

At this moment the party of hunters returns;

---

[i] quoth, saith.
[k] stinted, ceased.
[l] knewest.
[m] pity.

CHAP. XXIX. 1369.

and "this kyng," as Chaucer now styles him, mounting his horse, rides homeward,

Unto a place was there beside,
Whiche that was from us but a [a] lite,
A long castell, with wallés white,
On a riche hill.——

ver. 1316.

Defects of the poem.

There are several passages in this poem upon the death of the duchess, which mark in no common degree the crudeness of taste of the times in which Chaucer wrote. It is scarcely worth while again, as we did in examining the Troilus and Creseide, to quote single lines which are trite, vulgar and impotent; such as where Chaucer makes his hero say, exclaiming upon fortune,

for she is nothing stable,
Nowe by the fyre, nowe at the table.

ver. 645.

The present poem has much more considerable deformities. Nothing can be in a poorer

[a] little.

or more contemptible taste, than where the author, after having worked up the imagination of his readers with a picture of the inconsolable distress of the knight, goes on to make him describe his mischance under the allegory of having played at chess with fortune, and having lost the game. It may however be a still more intolerable absurdity, that his hero proceeds to excuse the conqueror, alleging,

1369.

> And eke she is the [a] lasse to blame,
> My selfe I wolde have do the same,
> Before God, had I ben as she.
> . . . . . .
> For al so wise God give me reste,
> I dare wel swere she toke the beste.
>
> ver. 675.

In answer to all this, Chaucer frigidly undertakes to console him by the examples of Medea, Phyllis and Dido, from Ovid's Epistles. These ladies, he observes, destroyed themselves, and are justly censured for their

---

[a] less.

CHAP. XXIX. 1369.

desperation. They indeed were driven upon their fate by the perfidious inconstancy of the men they adored:

> But there is no man alive here
> Wolde for [p] ther ferés make this wo.
>
> ver. 740.

It is in a similar style of insufferable trifling that, further on in the poem, where John of Gaunt is introduced speaking of the verses he wrote in praise of his mistress, Chaucer makes him digress into an impertinent discussion whether Pythagoras, or Jubal the son of Lamech, were the first discoverer of the art of music: and this in a discourse, delivered on an occasion of the utmost distress, interrupted with groans, and accompanied with all the tokens of the deepest affliction.

Such are some of the faults of Chaucer's epicedium. We have already had occasion to quote from it many passages of exquisite beauty, and shall presently introduce another,

---

[p] his companion, his partner.

which cannot fail to afford uncommon pleasure to every reader of taste.

1369.

Illustration which this poem affords to the history of Chaucer.

But perhaps the principal value of the Book of the Duchess, is to be found in the light which it is calculated to afford to the history of its author. Some uncertainty has been endeavoured to be thrown by Mr. Tyrwhit upon the question, whether the Parliament of Birds and the Dream of Chaucer are to be interpreted as alluding to the courtship and marriage of his illustrious patron. But no reasonable doubt can be formed that the Book of the Duchess relates to the untimely death of the heiress of Lancaster. Lydgate informs us that Chaucer wrote

Certainly written on occasion of the death of the duchess of Lancaster.

the dethe of Blaunche the duchesse [q].

Chaucer, in the enumeration of his works in the Legend of Good Women [r], uses precisely the same words as Lydgate. And, in the body of this epicedium, as if on purpose to defeat the groundless scepticism of those

[q] Fall of Princes, Prologue, stanza 44.

[r] verse 418.

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critics who appear to doubt only for the pleasure of taking from us all the materials of historical knowledge, he has introduced an unequivocal allusion to the name of his heroine.

> And FAIRÉ WHITÉ was she [a] hete,
> That was my ladies namé right;
> And she was therto faire and bright,
> She ne had not her namé wronge.
>
> ver. 948.

Connection of this piece with the Parliament of Birds, and with the poem entitled Chaucer's dream.

Now it fortunately happens that these three poems constitute a complete series; and, the application of one of them being established, that of the rest follows to the entire satisfaction of every reasonable mind, from the striking coincidence of two independent details; the first relative to the courtship of John of Gaunt, and the second belonging to the private history of the poet.

proved from the history of the courtship of John of Gaunt.

In the Parliament of Birds the female eagle is made to defer her decision upon the pretensions of her three admirers for a year:

[a] hight, called.

Almighty quene, unto this yere be done,
I ask respite, for to avisen me:

ver. 647.

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on which Nature addresses herself to the lovers,

[t] Bethe of gode herte, and serveth allé thre;
A yere is not so longe for to endure;
And eche of you [u] paine him in his degre
For to do wel.——

ver. 660.

Precisely the same circumstance occurs in the direct and acknowledged history of the courtship of John of Gaunt and the heiress of Lancaster, which is given in the Book of the Duchess. Gaunt is himself the relater.

And whan I had my tale [x] ydo,
God wote sh' acompted not a [y] stre
Of al my tale, so thoughten me:
To tel shortly, right as it is,
Trewly her answere it was this,—

---

[t] Be. [u] exert. [x] done, finished. [y] straw.

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I can not now wel countrefete
Her wordés, but this was the [z] grete
Of her answere:—she saiéd, Nay,
Al utterly.——

ver. 1236.

So it befell, an other yere
I thought [a] onés, I woulden fonde
To [b] doe her knowe and understonde
My wo; and she well understode
That I ne [c] wilned thyng but gode
And worship, and to kepe her name
Over all thynges, and drede her shame.

. . . . . .

So when my ladie knewe all this,
My ladie [d] yave me all whollie
The noble [e] yefte of her mercie.

ver. 1258.

from the particulars related in them of the history of Chaucer.

The coincidence of the three poems, so far as relates to the personal history of the author, is still more striking. In the Parliament of Birds Chaucer informs us, as he had already repeatedly done in the Troilus

---

[z] great, sum. [a] once. [b] cause.
[c] willed not. [d] gave. [e] gift.

and Creseide, that he was yet a stranger to the passion of love. CHAP. XXIX. 1369.

For all be that I knowe not love indede,
Ne wot how that he quiteth folke her hire,
Yet happeth me ful ofte in bokés rede
Of his miracles.

ver. 8.

In the poem entitled Chaucer's Dream (which I suppose to have been written twelve months later, when John of Gaunt had completed his year of probation, and was now united to his duchess), the poet is in love in all the forms. His nights are sleepless, and he wets his pillow with his tears: and, in the conclusion of the poem, we find him dreaming that his lady is prevailed upon by the importunity of the knight and princess, and consents to his suit. He awakes however, and regrets that it is but a delusion.

Lo, here my blisse! lo, here my paine!
Which to my ladie I complaine,
And grace and mercy her requere,
. . . . . .

CHAP. XXIX. 1369.

That of my dremé the substaunce
Might turnen once to cognisaunce.
ver. 2183.

In the Book of the Duchess Chaucer is still a lover, and his love is still unrequited. This appears from the uncommonly beautiful verses which constitute the exordium of the poem.

I have grete wonder by this light
Howe that I lyve, for daye ne night
I maye not slepen [f] welny nought,
I have so many an ydle thought,
Purely for the defaute of slepe,
That by my trouth I take no [g] kepe
Of nothing, howe it com'th or gothe,
[h] Ne me n'ys nothing lefe nor lothe;
Al is [i] liché gode to me,
Joye or sorowe, where so it be,
For I have felinge in nothing,
But as it were a [k] mased thing,

---

[f] well nigh. [g] notice, observation. [h] Nor am I either glad or sorrowful. [i] alike. [k] bewildered.

1369.

Al day in pointe to fall adoun,
For sorowful imaginacioun
Is alway wholy in my minde.

And well ye wote that againste [1] kinde
It were to liven in this wise;
For nature ne wolde not suffise
Unto none erthy créature
Not longé tymé to endure
Withouten slepe, and be in sorowe;
And I ne may ne night ne morowe
Slepen.——
Defaute of slepe and hevinesse
Hath slaine my spirite of quicknesse,
That I have lost al lustihed,
Soche fantasies ben in my hed.

He then goes on to assign a precise date to his malady. Long courtship of Chaucer.

I holde it be a sikénesse
That I have suffred this eyght yere;
And yet my [m] bote is ner the nere;

[1] nature. [m] advantage, remedy.

CHAP. XXIX. 1369.

For there is phisicien but one
That may me hele.

ver. 96.

The duchess Blanche indeed lived full ten years the wife of John of Gaunt; and so long, comparing the passages above quoted from the Dream with the language of the Book of the Duchess, Chaucer appears to have been the unsuccessful lover of the lady to whom he professes himself attached. How he came to call this period eight years, is more than I can pretend to explain; but Chaucer appears to have been a negligent chronologist; another example of which we have in this poem, where he describes John of Gaunt as twenty-four years old[n], at a time when we well know that he was within three months of completing the thirtieth year of his age. The circumstance however, whether of a ten or an eight years courtship, is so singular an occurrence, as may well enable us to get over

[n] See Vol. I, Chap. XX, p. 423.

this slight difference, and may forcibly impress upon our minds the internal and historical connection between the two poems, of Chaucer's Dream and the Book of the Duchess.

Chaucer not yet married.

From the tenour of the poem entitled the Book of the Duchess I think we may conclude with certainty that Chaucer was unmarried when he wrote it, and with probability that he finally married the lady to whom he so perseveringly paid his addresses. The wife of Chaucer was a woman of no mean birth, and her connections were of the highest class. Her sister was attached to the person of the duchess Blanche, and afterward became the governess to her daughters. If then we could conceive so ill of Chaucer's temper and disposition (in defiance of the striking evidence afforded us by his writings) as to believe that he would insult a virtuous and respectable woman, living under his roof, and confided by the laws of all civilised society to his guardianship and protection, by addressing, through the medium of publication, such love-verses as have been above recited,

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1369.

to another; we cannot however persuade ourselves that any but a madman would so directly and grossly affront the great personages who were continually bestowing upon him the marks of their favour.

Another independent circumstance comes strikingly in corroboration of this hypothesis of the late period of Chaucer's marriage. The queen died only two or three months before the duchess Blanche; and on the twentieth of January 1370 the king granted, by letters patent, pensions to her *domicellæ*, or maids of honour, in three classes; to four a pension of ten marks *per annum* respectively, to three a pension of one hundred shillings, and to two a pension of five marks *. In the second class is the name of Philippa Pycard, who was unquestionably the wife of Chaucer. From official records it appears that the Christian name of Chaucer's wife was Philippa, that she had been *domicella* to the queen of Edward III, and that after the queen's death

* Appendix, No.

she continued to receive a pension on that account[p]: and the circumstance of her father and elder sister bearing the surname of Rouet can scarcely be considered as an objection; as it was common, even down to the latest period of the French monarchy, for persons of distinction to bear two surnames, one of filiation and another the name of their principal estate, in consequence of which brothers or sisters of the same family often exhibited in their ordinary signatures no token of relationship. From the evidence here produced, it is probable that the name of Chaucer's father-in-law, written at length, was *Le Chevalier Payne Pycard de Rouet.* We find therefore, from the undoubted testimony of the style of the grant to Chaucer's wife, that he was not married at this time.

CHAP. XXIX. 1369.

The circumstances here recited may further show us what were the motives which so long delayed the accomplishment of Chaucer's wishes. The lady who was honoured

Reasons of the lady for deferring his suit.

[p] Appendix, No.

CHAP. XXIX.

1369. with his addresses may be presumed not to have been entirely indifferent to his person, his character, or accomplishments. But she could not resolve to quit the service of her royal mistress. This seems to be highly honourable to the queen. Chaucer however no doubt still promised himself, that he should be able to induce her to surmount this scruple of delicacy; especially as his addresses are said [q] (and he has insinuated as much in the poem of the Dream) to have been countenanced by the duke and duchess of Lancaster, and perhaps by the queen herself. The lady however, though mild (it may be, a little encouraging) in her refusals, still contrived to elude the conclusion of his suit. At length, the main topic of her objections having been removed by the lamented death of the queen, we may naturally infer that their nuptials were celebrated as soon as the general laws of decorum and the ideas of female delicacy would allow: and we shall see

1370. His marriage.

[q] Speght, Argument to Chaucer's Dream.

reason hereafter to believe, that Chaucer's marriage could not have taken place later than the year 1370. CHAP. XXIX. 1370.

The circumstance of so long a courtship may be received as an undoubted evidence of a steady, enthusiastic and undebauched temper of mind. Spenser has left us one hundred sonnets addressed to the lady whom he afterward married, descriptive of all the fluctuations of a protracted courtship. There is also another singular coincidence in this point: Spenser and Chaucer seem both to have married about the same period of life; the age of forty-two. They were however very different in the stamp of their minds. Though Spenser equal in powers of description any poet that ever existed, though his genius be resplendent and his language and his thoughts exquisitely beautiful, yet there is a sickliness and effeminacy in the character of his poetry, which makes us rather tender him as a sort of aerial creature, than honour him as a man. Chaucer's poetry is cast in a very different mould. In Spenser's particular excellences Chaucer is by no means his

Coincidence of circumstances in the lives of Chaucer and Spenser.

CHAP. XXIX. 1370.

equal. But the verses of our elder poet have no want of vigour and manliness; and in almost every one of his productions we recognise the elasticity of his spirit, and the healthful temper of his soul. If therefore he was a ten years suitor, we may be well assured that this circumstance was in him no indication of a whining and feeble temper, defective in discrimination, or nerveless and impotent to resolve.

Consideration in which Chaucer was now held, illustrated.

The marriage of Chaucer may be regarded as one of the first demonstrative evidences occurring in his history, of the important light in which he was viewed by his contemporaries. We might reasonably indeed presume this, from the known deference and honour with which poets of merit and genius were regarded in this early period of modern Europe. His pension however, granted in the year 1367, was not considerable; and may be conceived as of nearly the same value as the pensions granted to poets in more recent examples, by princes who certainly had no desire to make them their associates and their equals, and in times which could

engender the sentiment that it would be an enormous breach of decorum to inter a man distinguished only by his merit as a player [Garrick], among princes and statesmen, but that the honour has nothing in it to astonish us when we find that his tomb is only placed by the side of those of Shakespear and Milton [r].

CHAP. XXIX. 1370.

The marriage of Chaucer fully ascertains the rank in which he was placed. His wife was the daughter of a knight, and a man filling what was in those days regarded as a very distinguished office. Her own situation about the queen was one which we now find reserved for ladies of honourable birth. Her sister was placed in a similar office about the person of the duchess Blanche; and we may conclude, from the sequel of her history, as well as from the superintendence which was committed to her over the female offspring of this distinguished personage, that she was

[r] This sentiment is to be found in a volume entitled *Lettres sur l'Angleterre, par M. Fiévée*, 8vo, 1802.

CHAP. XXIX.

1370.

foremost in the possession of the confidence of the duchess. We have seen, in examining the poem entitled Chaucer's Dream, in what terms he speaks of the attention and deference yielded to his wife by the duke and duchess of Lancaster. It was by this marriage, as will hereafter appear, that our poet became the progenitor of the earl of Lincoln, declared by Richard III. presumptive heir to the crown of England; while the sister of Chaucer's wife was the ancestress of those who have now for more than three centuries been in actual possession of it.

CHAP. XXX.

LAST CAMPAIGN OF THE BLACK PRINCE.—CONDUCT OF THE DUKE OF LANCASTER.—CHAUCER SENT UPON A SPECIAL MISSION.

CHAP. XXX.

1370. Aquitaine escheated by the chamber of the peers of France.

THE transactions of the campaign of 1370 began with a memorable proceeding, which, while it ought to have revolted the hearts of mankind against Charles V, tended, by a singular inconsistency characteristic of the human mind, essentially to serve his cause. His first open step in the prosecution of the war was, as we have seen, to summon the Black Prince to answer before him, as his lawful superior, the complaints and allegations of the malcontent lords of Aquitaine. This summons was received, as he expected, with indignation and contempt. A citation of this sort seemed calculated to lead to a solemn and open trial, or rather to the mockery

CHAP. XXX. 1370.

of a trial. Charles however was not of a temper to wait the dilatory steps of a legal process. He saw his advantage for taking possession of the English provinces in the north of France in their unprovided condition; and, with that contempt of justice which marked all his proceedings, immediately seized it. He at the same time marched a considerable army against the frontiers of Aquitaine. But these military measures did not suspend the prosecution of the other part of his plan. He knew how to unite the cold and tedious formalities of justice with all the violence and rapacity of plunder. He brought the cause to a public hearing before the chamber of peers in Paris, and in the beginning of the year 1370 caused a sentence to be pronounced, declaring the Black Prince to have forfeited his rights in the duchy of Aquitaine, and confiscating all the English possessions in France to the use of the crown [a].

[a] Duchesne, Histoire d'Angleterre ad ann. Henault Abrégé Chronologique, ad ann.

A sentence of this sort, had all the inhabitants of Aquitaine been well affected and loyal, would have united them as one man in resentment of so atrocious an insult. But Charles, in the dark and insidious conceptions of his crafty spirit, had well known how to time his affront. The hearth-money had first given the signal of discontent in Aquitaine. Many of the feudatory lords of that province, before the commencement of hostilities, had retired to the court of France. Charles was subtle and indefatigable in his endeavours to corrupt the rest. Repeated instances of treachery and rebellion had driven the Black Prince and his ministers to some measures of legal severity and retributory justice[b]. This, in the spirit of disaffection which had been artfully propagated against him, did but increase the evil. It was at that moment that his adversary issued his

CHAP. XXX. 1370.

[b] Froissart, Vol. II, Chap. i. The historian refers these acts of severity to the year 1375; but what is related by him, Vol. I, Chap. cclxxviii, makes this the more probable date. See Barnes, Book IV, Chap. vii, §. 2.

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decree of forfeiture against him, and the consequences which resulted were in some degree what that adversary had foreseen and desired. The malcontents, who wanted but a pretext to colour their revolt, alleged that they could no longer in duty adhere to the English standard, but were obliged to submit to the sovereign lord of all France, who had been compelled by imperious necessity to sign an act of alienation, which he had no power to execute.

invaded by two French armies.

The sentence of confiscation being thus issued, Charles V. dispatched two considerable armies under his brothers, the dukes of Anjou and Berry, to enter Aquitaine in opposite directions [c]. The Black Prince however appears to have taken his measures so well, that they were not able to make any considerable impression upon his garrisons.

Revolt of Limoges.

The principal exploit of the French on this side was the capture of Limoges; and even this success they owed to the treachery of

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[c] Froissart, Vol. I, Chap. cclxxxi.

the bishop of that city, whom the Black Prince had particularly honoured with his confidance [d]. The prince was therefore highly exasperated at this occurrence; and, postponing every other consideration, resolved, whatever it cost him, to reduce this unfaithful city to his obedience. His health however was now so infirm that, in undertaking this expedition, he was obliged to be carried in a litter. Beside other persons of distinction who served under him, were his brothers, the duke of Lancaster, and Edmund of Langley now earl of Cambridge [d]. The city made a desperate resistance; but the walls were at length thrown down by mines, and the place entered by storm. The prince, rendered irritable by sickness, chagrined by the unprosperous state of his affairs, and deeply wounded by the infidelity of the treacherous bishop, stained the honour of his name by issuing orders for a general massacre. The soldiers who served under him appear to have too

1370. Black Prince marches against it.

Limoges taken by storm.

[d] Froissart, Vol. I. Chap. cclxxxvi, cclxxxvii.

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faithfully obeyed the injunctionsof their honoured master; and for some time the town exhibited a scene of the most horrible barbarity and anguish. At this distressful moment, the commandant of the garrison, accompanied by two of his friends, collected a chosen troop of eighty men, resolved to sell their lives as dearly as they could. They were presently encountered by the duke of Lancaster and a band of soldiers whom he had brought over from England for the service of this campaign. The Frenchmen were cut off almost to a man. The duke of Lancaster, with the earls of Cambridge and Pembroke, the son and the son-in-law of Edward III, according to the mode of the times selected the commandant and his two friends, and fought them hand to hand. The contest was obstinate and brave. At this crisis the Black Prince, who had entered the breach mounted upon his chariot, came toward the spot where they fought. Struck with the spectacle of so much bravery, he granted to the prowess of these knights, what we are told helpless children, and women in the

Desperate conflict.

Gallant behaviour of the duke of Lancaster.

agonies of death, had in vain sought to obtain from him. He ordered that these officers should be admitted to surrender, and at the same time issued directions for an amnesty to be proclaimed through the city [c].

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Another memorable circumstance marked the capture of Limoges. We know little of the personal character of the bishop; but we may reasonably conclude that he was a man of extraordinary endowments, since he had insinuated himself so deeply into the confidence of his sovereign. John of Gaunt was also his friend. Through the whole of his life this prince appears to have felt a powerful propensity to be the friend of admirable and extraordinary men. The bishop had been guilty of an offence which according to all the rules of policy exposed him to the punishment of death. But John of Gaunt had the weakness or the folly, if that be its

His generous artifice for the preservation of the bishop.

[c] Froissart, Chap. cclxxxix. Barnes, Book IV, Chap. vii, §. 20.

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name, of being in a high degree averse to see great powers of mind extinguished, and the wonders of the human race fall under the inexorable arm of the law. He pardoned the bishop of Limoges, as Aurelian might have pardoned Longinus.

To enable him to effect this, it was however necessary to employ a stratagem. He begged of his brother as a boon that the bishop might be his prisoner. The prince, unsuspicious of his purpose, though full of resentment against the prelate, easily granted the duke his request. He considered the bishop, however disposed of at present, as reserved for capital punishment. Having gained this point, John of Gaunt next dispatched an emissary to the pope at Avignon, conjuring him, as he valued the life of one of the most illustrious ornaments of the church, to write a letter interceding for his pardon. The letter arrived; the duke of Lancaster showed it to his brother; and the prince murmuring and unwillingly complied, saying, the duke had now the power to dis-

pose of him, but deeply regretting that he had deferred his vengeance so long[f]. Thus the innocent inhabitants suffered for the crime of their superior, while the real perpetrator of the guilt escaped, and was dismissed unhurt. For this inequality however John of Gaunt is responsible. He saw it was in vain to endeavour to appease the declining hero in the first exacerbations of his rage: but, because he could not do all the good he might desire, he did not therefore refuse to do the good in his power. CHAP. XXX. 1370.

A powerful diversion was made by Edward III. in this campaign, for the preservation of Aquitaine. He sent sir Robert Knolles, a commander of high reputation, with an army according to the English historians of twelve[g], and according to the French of thirty[h], thousand men, to penetrate by way of Calais into the heart of English invade France to the north.

[f] Froissart, ubi supra. Barnes, ditto.

[g] Hollinshead, ad ann.

[h] Mezeray, apud Barnes, §. 16.

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1370. Chivalrous exploits.

France. Sir Robert Knolles executed his commission with fidelity, and effected the objects for which he was employed. Two gallant exploits of individuals in his army are recorded, and deserve to be mentioned here as illustrating the military spirit of the times. Passing by Noyon, the English general in vain endeavoured to provoke the French garrison, which was numerous and well appointed, to come out and fight him. Seeing this, a Scottish knight in the army rode up to the barriers, and, dismounting, leaped over, saying, "Gentlemen, I have been desirous to visit you; and, seeing you will not come out to me, I am come in to you, to prove my knighthood against you: win me if you can." He then encountered twelve knights, hand to hand, for a whole hour, their generosity preventing him from being oppressed by numbers; and afterward sprung back over the barrier, remounted his steed, and retired unhurt[1]. At Paris the enemy stood equally upon

[1] Froissart, Chap. cclxxxiv.

the defensive. Here a knight in the English army determined to show his prowess, by striking with his spear against the gate of the city. He accordingly rode singly through the suburbs for that purpose, and accomplished his design; while the Frenchmen from the walls exclaimed, "Go thy way in God's name; sufficiently hast thou proved thy knighthood." On his return however, he was assaulted unawares by a butcher, and felled to the ground, and afterward murdered by the populace [k].

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The campaign of this year was closed by a misfortune of some magnitude. Sir Robert Knolles, having accomplished the object of his mission, retired to the west of France, and directed the different detachments of his army to fix their winter-quarters in Britanny, the duke of which country was in alliance with Edward III. Some of the young nobility in his army murmured against these orders. Sir Robert Knolles was of mean ex-

Misunderstanding among the english commanders.

[k] Ditto, Chap. cclxxxviii.

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traction; his first situation in the army had been that of a private soldier[l]; and, notwithstanding his high military qualities, these young knights had with great reluctance submitted to his command. They now alleged that the period of their service was expired, and that they were no longer bound to obedience. They derided the weakness of the French, who had suffered them to march through the heart of the kingdom without offering to molest them, and declared their intention to take up their quarters in the enemy's territories[m].

Du Guesclin marches against them.

During these dissensions, it happened that Du Guesclin, the general with whom the Black Prince had fought at Najara, and who was now fast rising into eminence, had been recalled by a message of Charles V. from the Castillian service, and had lately arrived in France. He was anxious to do something

[l] Weever, Funeral Monuments: Diocese of London; White Friars.

[m] Walsingham, ad ann.

on his native soil, to justify the expectations that were formed of him. In this situation, he heard of the state of sir Robert Knolles's army, and immediately conceived that the occasion which he sought was offered to him. He set out on his march from Paris with such forces as he could collect. The English general heard of his approach, and began to flatter himself that he should obtain the offer of a battle, which during his whole march he had earnestly sought. He summoned with all haste his different corps from their winter-quarters to meet him. They were however less prompt and exact in their obedience than the circumstances required; and the quarters which they had wilfully chosen placed them too nearly within reach of the enemy. Indefatigable exertion and celerity of motion were the characteristics of Du Guesclin's excellence, and were of the highest service to him on this occasion. He came up with a detachment of eight thousand English, who were on their march to join their general, and was so successful as to kill or take pri-

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His success.

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soners the whole of this body[a]. Having done this, he felt that he had effected all that he expected or desired. He withdrew; and left the general and officers of the English army to lament the fatal effects of jealousy and disobedience.

Chaucer sent upon a special mission.

In the course of this year we find Chaucer employed upon some commission to the continent, the object of which is not explained to us[b]. All that appears on the record is that, being about to pass beyond sea for the service of the king, he had letters of protection delivered to him for that purpose. These letters bear date on the twentieth of June. It is not easy to decide whether his marriage took place previously to this journey, or after his return. The age of Thomas Chaucer however, his son, who was speaker of the house of commons in the second year of Henry IV, may well incline us to assign the earliest admissible date to his father's marriage.

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[a] Froissart, Chap. ccxci. [b] Appendix, No. VI.

CHAP. XXXI.

DUKE OF LANCASTER LIEUTENANT OF AQUITAINE. —MARRIES THE HEIRESS OF CASTILLE.—ASSERTS HIS TITLE TO THAT CROWN.

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1371. Retirement of the Black Prince.

IN the beginning of the year 1371, the Black Prince, finding his health become daily more infirm, took his final leave of the government of Aquitaine, and sailed, with his consort, and his only surviving child, Richard, for England[a]. The period of his departure was marked with the melancholy circumstance of the death of his eldest son, seven years of age, whose funeral rites he left to the direction of his brother, the duke of Lancaster. He at the same time committed

[a] Walsingham, A. D. 1370.

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to the duke the reins of government in Aquitaine under the character of his lieutenant, conjuring the powerful barons and lords of the country to prove their attachment to himself by a devoted adherence to his honoured representative [b].

Affair of Montpaon.

Shortly after, there occurred an affair in some respects similar to that of the sack of Limoges. The fidelity of almost all the native lords of the English provinces in France was shaken by the sinister and corrupt practices of Charles V. Among them, the lord of Montpaon, a strong castle in the province of Rovergue, had entered deeply into these cabals. The Black Prince having taken his leave of the province of Aquitaine, he thought this a fit opportunity to reconcile himself to the court of France. He accordingly gave notice of his intention to a party of men at arms in the service of Charles V, and admitted them into his castle. The duke of Lancaster saw the necessity of a prompt in-

[b] Froissart, Chap. ccxciii.

terference to prevent the spirit of revolt from becoming general. He set out immediately with a select body of men, the flower of the English party in Aquitaine, and commenced a regular siege of Montpaon. The French who had taken possession, gallantly held out the garrison against him for some weeks. At length a practicable breach was effected in the walls, and every thing prepared for an assault. In this emergency the enemy applied for leave to surrender; and after certain parleys, and the urging of perhaps artificial demurs on the part of the duke of Lancaster, every individual in the castle was admitted prisoner of war [c]. The lord of Montpaon had previously made his escape.

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The whole of this year passed without any considerable action. It seemed as if both parties had tacitly consented to a suspension of hostilities. The king of France was desirous of gaining time for completing his plots, to which he trusted more than to

Suspension of the war.

[c] Froissart, Chap. ccxciv.

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his arms, for the recovery of Aquitaine. The task of the English was defensive; and, under the first impression of the melancholy state of the Black Prince, and the consequent unsettled posture of affairs, the duke of Lancaster did not think himself strong enough to engage in any decisive measure. The period of repose however was only temporary; and both parties prepared to make the campaign of 1372 decisive of the fate of the contest.

Second marriage of the duke of Lancaster.

During this interval the duke of Lancaster formed a second matrimonial engagement. His first marriage, if we may trust to the evidence of Chaucer, was the engagement of love. His second was probably the dictate of policy or ambition. We have already spoken of the contest between Peter the Cruel and his natural brother for the throne of Castille. Soon after the retreat of the Black Prince from his Spanish expedition, affairs in that country assumed a different aspect; and Du Guesclin, having been admitted to ransom, found means by his prowess and military skill to replace the

crown upon the bastard's head. Peter the Cruel was taken prisoner, and the usurper assassinated him with his own hand. Peter left issue two daughters, the eldest of whom had now become by the death of her father the legitimate heir to the Castillian throne. CHAP. XXXI. 1371. Death of Peter king of Castille.

These princesses were left, either as hostages or as guests, in the province of Aquitaine, when their father set out, accompanied by his illustrious protector, for the campaign of Najara; and they had continued in this equivocal species of exile from that time. In this moment of leisure and uncontrol, the duke of Lancaster cast his eyes upon these illustrious dames. He was indignant at seeing the last military achievement of his gallant brother overthrown, and an assassin and a bastard in quiet possession of one of the first crowns in Europe; he pitied the desolate and calamitous condition of these princesses; and he was perhaps not insensible in his own breast to the attractions of a throne. We shall probably find the duke of Lancaster in our further survey of his history, not listening to the suggestions of an irre- Character of John of Gaunt.

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gular ambition, incapable of yielding to an act of dishonour, yet fond of authority, eagerly desirous of reputation and respect, and not averse to that species of magnificence and ostentation which waits upon elevated rank. Impressed with these sentiments, he took with him his brother the earl of Cambridge, and waited upon the Spanish ladies in their retirement; and the result of the visit was the proposal of a double marriage. This measure had the sanction of the court of London; the nuptials were speedily solemnised [d]; and shortly afterward John of Gaunt took the title, and assumed the insignia, of king of Castille and Leon [e]. By this appellation he will frequently be distinguished in the remainder of this history: not that it gave to him real office, revenue or power; but that, if we would enter into men's characters, and comprehend their feelings, we must be careful to assume in fancy their situations, must follow their reasonings, re-

assumes the title of king of Castille.

[d] Froissart, Chap. ccc. [e] Sandford, Book IV, Chap. i.

cognise their prejudices, and call the surrounding objects by the names which they were accustomed to employ. John of Gaunt was from this time frequently addressed in the style of royalty; he kept a little court, and added somewhat to the splendour and magnificence in which he had hitherto lived; and these circumstances were by no means without their effect upon the subsequent transactions of his history.

Impolicy and immorality of this proceeding.

No proceeding can be less judicious, or afford less chance of ultimately redounding to the glory of him who adopts it, than this sort of speculative and dialectical claim to the supreme magistracy of a nation. The duke of Lancaster had a practical illustration of this before him, in the great measure of his father's reign; and it certainly conduces by no means to the credit of his sagacity or of the rectitude of his moral feelings, that so memorable a lesson produced so little impression upon him. Government is a topic of complicated and delicate texture: no consent, as some theorists have idly imagined, gives birth to its institution; yet it depends most

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intimately upon the temper, the prejudices and the opinions of those for the benefit of whom it ought to be conducted. The man who puts these out of the question, and considers with contempt or disrespect the sentiments of a nation in points in which it is most intimately concerned, makes a glaring exhibition of his weakness in regard to policy; and, though perhaps not of a depraved heart, acts as if he disdained all attention to the interests, the rights and the happiness of mankind. What was the duke of Lancaster to the Spanish nation? The majority of them scarcely knew of his existence; or, if they did, felt as much inclination to be governed by an emissary from the Grand Lama of Tartary, as by him. This generous people, with a prejudice congenial to the human mind, preferred for their sovereign a bastard and a regicide, born among them and descended from the race of their kings, to the most gallant and blameless prince on earth, of whom they had no knowledge, and who could not enter into their peculiarities. In this great crisis of the life of John of Gaunt,

he evinced the most essential deficiencies of character. His contemporaries, it is to be feared, did not comment, as it deserved, upon the immorality of his proceeding; but they felt most materially to his disadvantage the imbecility of pretending to a crown which he could have no reasonable hope to acquire, and of regaling his fancy with the gaudy outside of royalty, and the empty name of a king, which, while it conferred no power, must to the mind of every sober and judicious observer convey an idea of ridicule.

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Yet it is not difficult to assign the motive which influenced the duke of Lancaster in this measure. He felt, as his elder brother had done, indignant at the impudent usurpation and sanguinary actions of Henry of Transtamare. He desired by his own interposition to pluck him from the throne; and this project was not the less pleasing to him because he thought the proper conclusion of the exploit was to place himself upon the throne in his stead. John of Gaunt, like all the other children of Edward III, was bred in the purest and most refined notions of chi-

Motive from which it sprung.

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valry. We may therefore be well convinced that he contemplated with particular reverence the achievements of Rodrigo Dias, commonly called the Cid, and the other Spanish champions, who, in their contentions against the Moors, were the first to raise chivalry to the consummation of its splendour. To rescue this nation of heroes from the rod of an usurper, appeared to his thoughts the greatest of all human exploits; to preside over them the highest of all human glories. Zeal and enthusiasm are never very accurate calculators. He saw this perspective in distant view; and, unhappily for himself, and for his true and substantial fame, was too eager and animated, to allow him to consider its parts and estimate it in detail.

CHAP. XXXII.

POLITICAL ADMINISTRATION OF JOHN OF GAUNT.—ECCLESIASTICAL HISTORY OF THE THIRTEENTH CENTURY.—STATUTES OF PROVISORS AND PREMUNIRE.

FROM the consideration of the king of Castille in his relations with other countries, the course of events now leads us to view him as connected with the civil transactions of his own. Lionel duke of Clarence, the second son of Edward III, died in 1368; and the Black Prince brought with him, from his Spanish campaign in 1367, an impaired and broken constitution, which no subsequent care or skill had the power to restore. These events, together with the declining age of the king, made way for that high degree of political influence and power to which John of

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Gaunt rose in the concluding period of his father's reign. The ascendancy he now acquired had, as we have already observed, been in some measure prepared several years before, when, the duke of Clarence being settled in Ireland, and the Black Prince in Aquitaine, John of Gaunt was the only son of Edward III. remaining in England, whose years were sufficiently mature, or who possessed enough of energy, to be consulted by his father in the affairs of his government, or to be resorted to as a pillar of state whereupon to repose in a certain degree the cares of empire [a]. Edward III. is particularly distinguished in history by his fondness as a father; and, though blessed with a family of uncommon endowments, there is no one of his sons whom he appears to have loved more affectionately than John of Gaunt. It is now therefore incumbent upon us to endeavour to trace, in such indications as the memoirs and documents of the times will

[a] Chap. XXIII, p. 226.

afford, the progressive degrees of political power attained to by this eminent personage. We may sufficiently judge, from Chaucer's situation, his secret mission in 1370 already mentioned [b], his public embassy to Genoa in 1372 [c], and the confidential place which his poems upon John of Gaunt's courtship and marriage prove him to have held in the friendship of this prince, that we cannot treat of the political conduct and proceedings of the martial hero, without descanting upon matters in which Chaucer was eminently concerned and deeply involved. This will be made still more evident in the sequel. In the convulsive and turbulent reign of Richard II, Chaucer invariably rose and fell with the interchangeable vicissitudes of authority and disgrace of his master the king of Castille. CHAP. XXXII.

The most considerable domestic concern of the English government which was in

[b] Chap. XXX, p. 394. [c] Chap. XXXV.

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agitation at the period to which our subject now leads us, was relative to the usurpations and incroachments of the court of Rome, upon the royal prerogative and upon the internal polity of England. The dispute about investitures in the eleventh century, in which the emperors of the house of Franconia were humbled at the feet of pope Gregory the Great and his successors, has already been mentioned[d]. The sovereign pontiff was triumphant in this contest; he in consequence very frequently nominated whomever he pleased to the vacant bishoprics and benefices in every country of Europe. The ascendancy of the church however was never so complete, as to preclude the occasional interference of secular sovereigns and lay patrons in promoting their own adherents to ecclesiastical dignities. Both parties seem to have found their advantage in leaving the question in this uncertainty; and neither had the for-

[d] Vol. I, Chap. IV, p. 66.

titude to urge the affair practically to a general issue, though each was loud and copious in asserting his several pretensions. CHAP. XXXII.

When literature and civilisation had so far gained ground as to give a decisive check to the usurpations of the church, the authority of the Roman pontiff in this article became daily more a subject of question and complaint. Under these circumstances it was unfortunate for his cause, that his incroachments bore too much the appearance of pecuniary rapacity and extortion, a topic sufficiently level to the apprehensions of mankind even in ages of the greatest blindness and ignorance. Various were the contrivances of the venerable head of the church, to drain the different provinces of Christendom of their treasures, and with money from all quarters to fill the Roman coffers. For this purpose, he exacted, on various pretences, great contributions from the clergy. He introduced a new tax under the name of first-fruits, alleging that he had a right to one year's income upon all vacant bishoprics and ecclesiastical

Impositions of the Roman pontiff.

Contributions of the clergy.

First-fruits.

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preferments. He summoned all bishops and archbishops to repair to Rome, to obtain from him a solemn installation into their new dignities. He drew all ecclesiastical causes of impertance thither, where he kept the parties waiting for a long time, and at an immense expence, for a decision. The sale of indulgences, pardons and dispensations, the occasions for which were continually multiplied, brought a boundless revenue to the court of Rome. In a word, it was a notorious scandal, which every one repeated and none had the boldness to deny, that every thing was venal in that government. Beside these direct sources of revenue, the pope accumulated wealth upon his friends and adherents by reservations and provisions; expedients which were necessary, on account of the extent of his spiritual dominions, to prevent the chapters and ecclesiastical incorporations on the spot from filling the vacant dignities before he should have heard that they were void. By reservations, the pope declared beforehand, that he reserved to himself the nomination

The episcopal pall.

Appeals.

Indulgences, pardons and dispensations.

Reservations and provisions.

to such benefices or sees, whenever they should fall in: and by provisions, he announced certain individuals as the destined successors on the resignation or death of the present incumbents.

Ecclesiastical history of the reign of Henry III.

All these subjects of complaint were taken up with great spirit in this country, under the long reign of Henry III. The king himself, weak and pusillanimous in his temper, showed little disposition to resist the encroachments of the sovereign pontiff; but a new party rose against the court of Rome in the persons of the barons. They particularly exclaimed with much vehemence against the multitude of Italians who were nominated by the pope to livings in England, though ignorant of the manners and customs of the country from which they derived their revenues, and even unacquainted with its language, so that preaching and the cure of souls were wholly neglected. In the true spirit of the times, they did not stop at remonstrance; but entered into associations, and threatened to drive these foreign ecclesi-

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astics from the kingdom [e]. The pope however does not seem to have been deterred by their menaces; as we read, a few years afterward, of various livings and dignities, to the amount of three hundred, conferred by the papal legate resident in this country [f].

Bishop Grossteste.

The pious and venerable bishop Grossteste, the friend of Roger Bacon, distinguished himself by his opposition to this mercenary and sinister policy of the court of Rome. The pope having sent him a mandate, requiring him to bestow upon one of his holiness's nephews, then a child, a vacant canonry in his see of Lincoln, Grossteste refused to obey, and remonstrated with the pontiff in these terms. "If we except the sins of Lucifer and Antichrist, there neither is nor can be a greater crime, nor any thing more contrary to the doctrine of the gospel, or more odious and abominable in the sight of Jesus Christ, than to ruin and destroy the

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[e] Matt. Paris, A. D. 1231. Rymer, Tom. I, 16 Hen. 3, Jun. 7.

[f] Matt. Paris, A. D. 1241.

souls of men, by depriving them of the spiritual aid and ministry of their pastors. It is impossible therefore that the holy apostolical see, which received its authority from the Lord Jesus Christ for edification, and not for destruction, can be guilty of such a crime, or any thing approaching to such a crime, so hateful to God, so hurtful to men. This would be a most manifest corruption and abuse of its authority, would forfeit all its glory, and plunge it into the pains of hell [g]."

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Edward I, the successor of Henry III, was a prince of a very different character, and his measures were such as might be expected from the depth of his policy and the energy of his temper. With him originated the important statute of mortmain, prohibiting the clergy from making further acquisitions of land from the pious bequests or donations of their votaries, under pain of forfeiting the property in such manner acquired [h]. In the

Ecclesiastical history of Edward I.

Statute of mortmain, 1279.

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[g] Matt. Paris, A. D. 1259.

[h] Statutes at Large, 7 Edv. 1, Stat. 2.

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Dispute of Edward I. with his clergy. 1297.

twenty-fifth year of his reign he was engaged in a dispute with the clergy of his dominions respecting their obligation to contribute to the necessities of the state; and, receiving from them a refusal of his demand, supported by a papal bull which forbade their compliance, he, instead of applying to the pope for a relaxation of his precept, adopted a shorter and more peremptory method, telling his clergy that, since they refused to contribute to the support of civil government, they were unworthy to reap the benefits of it, and accordingly declaring them out of the protection of the law. He gave directions to the officers in his different courts, to hear those causes only respecting the clergy, in which they were defendants; to do every man justice against them, and to do them justice against nobody. The consequence of this, pursuant to the ferocious manners of the times, was, that they could not appear abroad, without being attacked by ruffians or persons who had an animosity against them, dismounted from their horses, and stripped of their property, and even apparel; nor were

they safe in their own houses. The archbishop of Canterbury, the leader of this opposition, was reduced to fly from his palace, and hide himself obscurely, with a single servant, under the roof of a country-clergyman[1]. Thus did this rigorous and stern politician prosecute the quarrel in which he was engaged. He subjected his adversaries to a species of martyrdom, which had no tendency to feed their arrogance or their vanity, but was on the contrary the most mortifying to spiritual pride that could be imagined. He remained as it were a passive spectator of their persecution; and rendered his subjects the instruments of this ecclesiastical war, without subjecting himself to the invidious appearance of being active in the contest. He inforced his own cause, that of weakening the empire of the hierarchy, in the most effectual manner, by employing the people to insult the order they had regarded as sacred, or accustoming them to see it insulted. One

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[1] Hume, Chap. XIII.

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of the last measures of the reign of Edward I, was a statute passed in a parliament held by him at Carlisle, called the statute of provisors; prohibiting the bringing into the kingdom any of the pope's writs of provisions or reservations for the disposal of benefices, and the exportation of money under the denomination of first-fruits, or of any of the various taxes which, under numerous pretences, the court of Rome imposed upon this vassal island [k].

Statute of provisors. 1307.

Edward II.

It was in this state that the question of civil and ecclesiastical authorities was delivered down to Edward III. It does not appear that any strong measures were adopted against the usurpations of the church under the imbecil and temporising reign of Edward II.

State of the church at the accession of Edward III.

On a superficial review of the subject, we

[k] This statute is said in the preamble to the statute, 25 Edv. 3, Stat. 6, to have been passed in the twenty-fifth, but the tenour of the history makes it probable that its true date is the thirty-fifth, year of Edward I. See Barnes, Book I, Chap. xxi, §. 10; and the marginal correction to this preamble in Ruffhead.

might suppose that considerable progress had been made in the thirteenth century toward reducing the insolent and enormous power which had been engrossed by the court of Rome. Something undoubtedly was done; the mind of Europe was materially changed, during that period which, as was observed on a former occasion[1], was illustrated by the united intellect of a few of the greatest men that ever existed. But much less was done than might have been imagined. The genius of the age was ill adapted for the methodical and progressive erection of dams and wears to shut in the imperious flood of ecclesiastical usurpation. The prejudices of mankind had now for several generations been favourable to this abject superstition. What the hierarchy lost under a vigorous secular administration, they recovered under the feeble one which followed. What was wrested from them by the stern and fearless baron in the hour of his health and pride, they knew

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[1] Vol. I, Chap. II, p. 26.

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how to regain, by presenting before him his childhood terrors of damnation and purgatory, on the bed of sickness. The statutes which were made to restrain their incroachments, were of little avail. It was the fashion of this period, that statutes not continually urged and consulted, fell into disuse, and even seem to be supposed to have lost their authority. This is the clue, which explains to us the repeated reenactions of Magna Charta and many of our most salutary laws with the same formalities and solemnity as if they were then introduced for the first time.

Statute of provisors revived. 1343.

It is not till the seventeenth year of Edward III. that we find any notice of parliamentary measures against the incroachments of the court of Rome, in the ancient records of this reign. Stratford archbishop of Canterbury is supposed to have been the author of the proceedings then adopted [m]. He had been an active and useful minister of Edward III; but, having two years before been

[m] Barnes, Book I. Chap. xxii, §. 2.

involved in a quarrel with his sovereign, he is believed to have brought forward these measures, partly that he might the more fully reinstate himself in the favour of the king; and partly perhaps, in conformity to his character and duties as primate of England, that he might shut out the enormous influx of foreigners into the benefices of the English church preventing the regular and wholesome instruction of the people, that he might maintain the purity of its ancient constitution as to the election or nomination of its ministers, and that he might prevent its revenues from being thus injuriously conveyed into foreign countries. By his advice then, parliament was instigated to send for the act of the last year of Edward I. from Carlisle, and to reenact its clauses against provisions and appeals [n]. In the year following, it having been remarked that the injunctions of this statute had not been accompanied by penalties, an amending act was introduced,

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Statute of premunire. 1344.

[n] Cotton, 17 E. 3.

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subjecting those who transgressed it to the pains of outlawry[o]. The purposes of this law were somewhat reinforced by the circumstance, that the reigning pope was a Frenchman, and was conceived to adhere to the king's enemies in the war then depending for the claim of Edward III. to the crown of France. Yet it sufficiently appears, from the frequent agitation of the subject in parliament, that its execution was partial and irregular. The reenaction of the act against the pope's nomination to benefices and the appeals carried to Rome, commonly called the statute of provisors, and of the act of penalties against offenders in these points called the statute of premunire, from which these laws in our statute-book take their date, was in 1351 and 1353 respectively[p].

These statutes reenacted. 1351, 1353.

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[o] Cotton, 18 E. 3.

[p] Statutes at Large, 25 Edv. 3, Stat. 6; and 27 Edv. 3, Stat. 1, cap. 1.

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KING JOHN'S TRIBUTE ABOLISHED. — RISE OF WICLIFFE. — PARLIAMENTARY REMONSTRANCE AGAINST THE APPOINTMENT OF CHURCHMEN TO THE GREAT OFFICES OF STATE.—WILLIAM OF WYKEHAM.

SUCH was the relative condition of the civil and ecclesiastical authorities in England at the commencement of the period we have now to consider. Little further occurs on the subject of the pope's oppressive pretensions, till the year 1365. At that time we find the statutes of provisors and of premunire once again reenacted at the personal requisition of the king [a]. But the year is ren- 1365. King John's tribute demanded.

[a] Cotton, 39 E. 3.

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dered more remarkable by the letters of pope Urban V. to the king of England, requiring the payment of the arrears of the tribute of one thousand marks *per annum*, imposed upon the realm by king John, and which had failed to be discharged ever since the year 1333 (the very year in which Edward III. came of age); and summoning the king to his court to answer for the default, in case he should hesitate to comply with this demand [b].

It cannot perhaps be exactly ascertained at this distance of time, with what degree of regularity this disgraceful tribute had been conceded. Some historians have questioned whether it had ever been paid after the death of its royal imposer [b]. There are however various records in the collections of Rymer [c], proving that it was discharged, though irregularly and with intermissions and arrears, in one instance of eight and in another of

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[b] Barnes, Book III, Chap. xii, §. 8.

[c] Tom. II, 5 Edv. 1, Dec. 18; 6 Edv. 1, Feb. 23; 16 Edv. 1, Apr. 28; 29 Edv. 1, Mar. 18.

eleven years, down to the year 1330[d], which may be admitted as an evidence sufficient to establish the veracity of pope Urban's representation. CHAP. XXXIII. 1365.

It certainly appears to have been ill policy in the pope, to have revived this obsolete claim at the present period. The reign of Edward III. was illustrious; his character was high; and his influence and name were sufficiently great, to enable him to treat with contempt the demand that was now made. He had gained the battles of Cressy and Poitiers, and confirmed himself in all the acquisitions he could ever have thought of as permanent, by the peace of Bretigni. No event had yet happened to tarnish his glory, or disarm his energy. The sovereign pontiff attacked him in all his vigour, instead of waiting for the period which soon after arrived, when he appeared, to the vulgar eye at least, shorn of his beams. Unseasonableness of the demand.

Edward III. felt that the time had now 1366. It is refused.

[d] Tom. IV. 4 Edv. 3, Apr. 28.

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come, to reject for ever the ignominious vassalage which his base-hearted predecessor had fastened upon the realm; and accordingly, instead of adopting any measures for discharging the pretended arrears, he resolved to submit the whole question to the parliament which met on the thirtieth of March in the following year. This assembly with one consent pronounced, that neither king John, nor any other king, could bring the realm and people into such thraldom without the approbation of parliament, and that what he had done was contrary to his coronation oath; they therefore exhorted the king, if the pope should attempt any thing against him by process or any other way, to oppose such usurpation with all his power and force[e]. It was on this occasion that Edward III. came to a resolution of putting an end to the payment of the annual tax of one penny upon each house for the support of an English college at Rome, commonly called Peter's Pence,

Peter's Pence abolished.

[e] Cotton, 40 E. 3.

which had originated in the time of the heptarchy [f]. CHAP. XXXIII.

1366. Wicliffe.

At this period it is that the memorable name of Wicliffe first occurs in the annals of our country. He seized the present occasion to write a treatise against the tribute claimed by Urban V, in answer to an argument published by an English monk in defence of the papal demand [g]. He had before distinguished himself by his writings against the claims and the pretended superior holiness of the mendicant friars [h], following in these productions the steps of William de St. Amour, and Richard archbishop of Armagh, before mentioned [i]. As the same parliament which abolished king John's tribute, made a law, forbidding the mendicants to receive any scholar into their orders under the age of eighteen years [k], we may with some degree of probability infer, that Wicliffe did not enter into

Act against the mendicant friars.

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[f] Barnes, Book III, chap. xiii. §. 1.
[g] Lewis, Life of Wicliffe, Chap. II.
[h] Lewis, Chap. I.
[i] Chap XXV.
[k] Cotton, 40 E. 3.

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the national question as a private individual, but more probably that he was encouraged to take up the pen by the king or his ministers.

Genius of this reformer.

Wicliffe was a man of humble birth, but possessed of the most transcendant abilities. This will more fully appear in the sequel of what we shall have occasion to observe respecting him. He was one of those persons who reflect the greatest lustre upon the country which was so fortunate as to have produced them. His mind was scarcely less original than that of Bacon or Shakespear; and he has procured for this island the enviable distinction, of having been the first to break the chains which superstition and an hypocritical policy had imposed upon the powers of investigation, reasoning and the discovery of truth, which characterise the human mind.

The contemporaries of Wicliffe did justice to the superiority of his abilities. The monkish historians, who pour out every kind of virulence and invective against him, yet appear at a loss for words to express their conception of his talents. In philosophy, they

tell us, he was reckoned second to none, and in the depths of scholastic reasoning was without a peer. His powers incessantly goaded him to surpass others in the subtlety of his knowledge and the profoundness of his invention, and to strike into the paths of new and original opinions[l]. 1366.

His early history.

He accordingly rose early to the greatest distinctions which the university of Oxford, in which he was bred, could bestow upon him. In 1361, when he was thirty-seven years of age, he was elected master of Baliol college[m]; and four years after he was invited by Simon Islip archbishop of Canterbury to accept the function of warden of a new college, which that prelate founded in the university under the name of Canterbury Hall[m]. To this time Wicliffe was conspicuous only for the eminence of his abilities, the profoundness of his disquisitions, and the gravity and elevation of his unblemished character.

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[l] Knighton, A. D. 1382.

[m] Lewis, Chap. I.

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His connection with John of Gaunt.

Two years after the question of the papal tribute, we find him dedicating one of his works to John of Gaunt [a]. This is one of the first unequivocal symptoms of the political ascendancy of this prince, and renders it by no means improbable that John of Gaunt was concerned in the spirited measure of the abolition of the papal tribute. The connection between him and Wicliffe for several years after this is known to have been strict and intimate.

Partiality displayed by John of Gaunt for men of literary genius.

Thus we are led to observe one of the principal and most interesting peculiarities of this accomplished prince, to which he is indebted, perhaps more than to any other, for the proverbial eminence which he has constantly inherited in the mouths of the English people. It was not that he was a man of great splendour and magnificence; it was not that he was a man of a lofty and elevated spirit; it was not that he was an ac-

[a] Lewis, Chap. II.

complished soldier; other princes have equalled, perhaps exceeded, him in all these attributes. But the faculty by which he discriminated the man of an heaven-born mind, and the sentiment by which he attached himself to such men, and they became attached to him, was peculiarly his own. It is with Wicliffe seated on his right hand, and Chaucer on his left, that we must view John of Gaunt, if we would enter into the merits of his character. CHAP. XXXIII. 1368.

In June 1370, as we have already seen, Chaucer was employed by the king in a secret commission to the continent. This may be considered as a further indication of the political ascendancy of John of Gaunt, his protector and friend. 1370.

In the following year we meet with a very curious transaction, which, in the paucity of authentic information that has come down to us, we can resort to conjecture only to explain. In the parliament which met on the twenty-fourth of February, the lords and commons represented to the king, that the government of the realm had been for a long 1371. Parliamentary remonstrance against the appointment of churchmen to the great offices of state.

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time in the hands of men of the church, by which many mischiefs had happened in time past, and more might happen in times to come, to the disherison of the crown and great prejudice of the kingdom: they therefore petitioned that secular men only might be principal officers of the king's court and houshold, as particularly chancellor, treasurer, keeper of the privy seal, and the like, and none of the clergy [o]. To this application the king answered, that he would act in this point by the advice of his council [o]. It appears however by the records [p], that in the following month William of Wykeham bishop of Winchester resigned the office of chancellor, and Thomas Brentingham bishop of Exeter the staff which he held in quality of treasurer of the realm.

Resignation of the lord chancellor and lord treasurer.

Causes of this revolution.

This circumstance must necessarily have originated in some species of intrigue or confederacy. The parliaments of Edward III.

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[o] Cotton, 45 Edv. 3.

[p] Rymer, Tom. VI, 45 Edv. 3, Mar. 4. Godwin, De Præsulibus Angliæ.

were by no means so powerful as to be enabled to give the law to the throne. When they appear most so they were merely the tools to some clan of courtiers, or some combination of the great barons of the realm. Edward III. was not of a temper inclining him to bend to the insolence of a democracy, or to consent to any measure at the will of a public body, which he had not been previously induced to approve. The most natural solution of the mystery, and that which has been hinted at by several of our old historians, is that the change of administration which now took place, originated in, and was concerted with, John of Gaunt duke of Lancaster [q].

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Two motives may be assigned for this proceeding; and it is not improbable that both concurred in producing it. The duke of Lancaster was at this time possessed of great power and influence, and was consequently

Ascendancy of John of Gaunt in the councils of his father.

[q] Parker, De Antiquitate Britannicæ Ecclesiæ, Cap. LVIII. Collier, Ecclesiastical History of Great Britain, Book VI, ad ann.

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impatient of every thing which tended to traverse that influence. This is the nature of the human mind: a man can scarcely be a wise or a good man, and be void of this sentiment. He must have plans for public honour, improvement or happiness, and he cannot fail to be anxious for the execution of these plans. He ought to be easy of conviction, eager for information, and fond of that collision of other men's habits of thinking and his own, which has so powerful a tendency to elicit truth. But, if he be of a clear and manly temper, he cannot be pleased to have his projects thwarted, and other measures, which his understanding condemns, substituted in their room.

History of William of Wykeham.

The most formidable rival the duke of Lancaster could have to encounter in his father's favour and good opinion was William of Wykeham. This celebrated personage, eminent in his own times, and interesting to posterity by his munificent establishments at Winchester and Oxford, was of obscure parentage, and is said to have been indebted for such an education as he received to the cha-

ritable interference of some beneficent patron[r]. His biographer, as we have seen, congratulates him on the advantage of never having attended the lectures of any university[s], and his contemporaries, in an age in which, wherever literature was possessed, it was commonly possessed in an eminent degree, were accustomed to call him unlearned. It cannot be doubted however that his sagacity and natural abilities were extraordinary. He was early placed near the person of Edward III[t], and he appears particularly to have won the heart of this splendid monarch by his skill in architecture. He was engaged from the year 1359 in rebuilding on a plan of his own the castle at Windsor[u]; and that illustrious monument of ancient art remains to this day for the most part in the state in which Wykeham left it. He also built

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[r] Lowth, Life of Wykeham, Sect. I.

[s] See Vol. I, Chap. X, p. 315.

[t] Lowth, ubi supra.

[u] Walsingham, ad ann.

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another favourite residence for his master, at Queenborough in the county of Kent [v].

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His character.

But Wykeham was not merely an architect; he was also a man of business, and in this character was much employed and promoted by Edward III. It is easy for us to raise up to our imagination the character of a man of this sort. He was sober, sagacious and penetrating; with no mercurialness of temper calculated to involve him in disgrace, and no wanderings of theory or of fancy, which might plunge him into error, or subject him to the charge of fluctuation and versatility. Handsome he appears to have been, and tall; with a gravity of countenance fitted to keep impertinence at a distance, and a plausibility of manner which, with the generality of observers, has a more imposing effect than all the flights of genius and all the ardour and enterprise of virtue. So wary was he as a politician, that history has doubt-

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[v] Lowth, ubi supra.

ed to rank him either among the supporters or opposers of Wicliffe; yet we shall see reason in the sequel to convince us that in a cautious and prudent way he enlisted himself with the persecutors of the new sect. It is indeed natural to suppose that a man of his grave and calm disposition, fond of authority and power, and occupying so high a situation in the church, would adhere rather to the party that was anxious to preserve the prerogatives and splendour of the body of which he was a member, than to those who were desirous to reduce it to its primitive simplicity. Wykeham's habits of business were early and inveterate; his very relaxations were elaborate; and the cast of his mind led him, in his hours of leisure, to delight in drawing plans of buildings of which he was to be the founder, and constructing laws of discipline which he was to see carried into action, and by which he was to direct societies of men even after he should cease to exist [x].

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[x] Lowth, Sect. VI.

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1371. His numerous preferments.

Such was the favourite of the maturer years of Edward III. The king thought he could not do enough for a man whom he found in so many ways useful to him. By his own certificate delivered in to his ordinary before he was bishop of Winchester, it appears that he possessed benefices to the immense amount of £. 873 : 6 ; 8[7]; that is, of our money thirteen thousand and one hundred pounds *per annum*. His secular revenues, as keeper of the privy seal, principal secretary of state, and clerk of the works, are not included in this account.

His political revenues.

Still however the king was desirous of conferring upon him something more permanent or more elevated; and there was nothing that so truly possessed these characteristics as some of the higher stations in the church. Wykeham was all-powerful with his master, and had made his choice; he resolved to be bishop of Winchester, in which city he had been educated, and at a village

[7] Lowth, Sect. I.

in the neighbourhood of which he was born. CHAP. XXXIII.

1371. is made bishop of Winchester.

The holder of this bishopric died in October 1366. The king immediately issued his *congé d'élire* to the persons who had the right of electing a successor; the recommendation of Edward III. was unanimously complied with[z]; and Wykeham reached the great object of his ambition. But in these times it was customary to obtain the pope's bull permitting the bishop elect to be consecrated; and Wykeham could not hope for that respect among his brethren of the bench, which was the idol of his heart, if he did not pass through the customary form. It happened, as we have already seen, that the king was at this time deeply involved in a controversy with the pope; and it was to be expected that the sovereign pontiff would make his conferring any benefit upon the favourite minister of Edward III. the price of some concession to be yielded by that mon-

[z] Lowth, Sect. II.

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arch. What in other cases was commonly deemed a matter of course, was thus in the present instance raised into an affair of delicacy. In this emergency the king applied to the duke of Bourbon, one of the hostages for the ransom of John king of France, who was now on a leave of absence in that country; and the duke made a journey to Avignon, where the pope resided, for the express purpose of bringing him to compliance. The point was adjusted [a]; and the price of the duke of Bourbon's interference seems to have been his being admitted to ransom in the following year [b]. Froissart, the relater of this story, and who was at this time actually residing at the court of London, introduces the person of the bishop elect in these terms. "Now there reigned in England a priest, by name William of Wican. This Wican was in so entire possession of the royal favour, that every thing was done by him, and without him was nothing done."

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[a] Froissart, Vol. I, Chap. ccxlix.

[b] Rymer, Tom. VI, 42 Edv. 3, Jan. 28,

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1371. His offices of state.

The series of Wykeham's secular promotions was as follows. In 1359 he was appointed clerk of the works; in 1364 keeper of the privy seal, and secretary of state; and in 1367 chancellor [c].

Contrast between John of Gaunt and Wykeham.

Such was the minister whom John of Gaunt undertook to displace. The contrariety of their views was natural and unavoidable. Edward III. at this period of his life loved repose, and Wykeham was a minister fitted to indulge the propensities of his master. Wykeham had no passions adapted to lead him into bold and dangerous ways. He was a lover of money, of magnificence, and of an established and unquestioned respect and authority. His maxim will be perceived to have been, not to remove even an abuse that appeared useful. John of Gaunt was of a very opposite temper. He was in the vigour of his youth, and burned with ambition and a desire to signalise himself. His favourite relaxation was in the society of men of

[c] Lowth, Sect. I, II.

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literary genius; he contemplated their improvements and discoveries with delight, and felt anxious to draw something from them for the honour and advantage of his country. It was not his object, as it was that of Wykeham, to pass through life respected and unquestioned; he was desirous to leave a track of splendour and unanticipated benefits behind him.

Contrivance for the dismission of Wykeham.

By means of the representation of the two estates in parliament, an easy and decent fall was contrived for the king's favourite. It appears as if the measure were concerted between all the three parties: Wykeham was pleased that he was not dismissed by his master; and Edward III. consented to enter willingly into a proceeding which had the appearance of being dictated to him. Parliament passed no censure upon the minister, but pointed their proscription at the order to which he belonged. The king loved his minister; but he had a still stronger affection for his able and accomplished son. The whole transaction appeared the less invidious, as John of Gaunt was at this time employed

on the continent; and, so far from there being an absolute breach between him and Wykeham, he made a point, in leaving the kingdom in 1373 and 1375, to appoint the bishop of Winchester one of the trustees and attorneys for him in his absence [d].

Sentiments at this time prevalent respecting the ecclesiastical order.

There is yet another point of view in which the parliamentary representation here spoken of may be considered, and in which it is still more worthy of our remark and attention. One of the many causes of the ascendancy of the clergy in the dark ages was, that the learning of the times being engrossed by them, they were ordinarily the only persons found qualified to fill even the civil offices of the state. They were our historians, our fine writers, and our poets; and they alone possessed the degree of general knowledge and of practice in business, which was necessary in public affairs. Now that the time was come when other candidates

[d] Rymer, Tom. VII, 47 Edv. 3, Mai. 12; and 49 Edv. 3, Mar. 1.

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might perhaps with equal advantage have entered the lists with them, habit, as usually happens in matters of this sort, prevailed, and churchman succeeded churchman, unquestioned, and as if by an essential law of diplomatical succession. It became a part, as it were, of the religion of our ancestors to see high office combined with the clerical character; and it appeared a sort of sacrilege in their eyes, to behold a chancellor of the realm, or a treasurer of the public revenues, otherwise habited than in the vestments and rochet of a dignified clergyman. The ecclesiastical order, we may be certain, were sufficiently willing to encourage prejudices arising from this source and reluctant to part with one of the fairest appendages of their vocation: so that it came to be thought that they, and only they, had integrity enough for the discharge of so important a trust, and that to withhold it from them was to rob them of their right, and to draw down upon the daring innovator who should attempt it the signal vengeance of their invisible and almighty master.

We may well be surprised then to see the parliament of 1371 abruptly and at once entering a rule of general proscription against them; and, consulting the series of public events, we may reasonably class this as one symptom of the progress of the opinions and dogmas of Wicliffe. Wicliffe indeed was as yet new to the great world; and it is perhaps impossible to trace any of those positions which were original and exclusively his own, so far back as to this period. But the mighty germ of innovation of which he was the author, was no doubt before this fermenting in his mind; and the history of this admirable hero of intellect has never yet been investigated with sufficient patience and perspicacy, to furnish us with the exact series of the events of his life. When he began his preaching, we know that the progress of his tenets was little less than miraculous; and it is under the date of 1382, only eleven years after this transaction, that Knighton the monkish historian assures us, that every second man throughout England was a Lollard. The vote of 1371 is strongly impressed with

1371. Origin of these sentiments.

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the stamp of Wicliffe's intrepidity and decision; and we may justly conclude that it was not passed without his participation, and that at the period which was found ripe for such a measure he had already formed a very considerable party.

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DISASTROUS CAMPAIGN OF 1372.

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IN the close of the year 1371, the new-titled king of Castille, with his brother the earl of Cambridge, and their brides, came over to England; the alleged motive being to consult with his father and the government respecting the plan of the ensuing campaign[a]. He left the command of Aquitaine during his absence in the hands of the captal of Buche, the ablest and most renowned of the soldiers now living who had served under Edward III. The fate of sir John Chandos has already been mentioned; and sir Walter Manny died at an advanced age in this year[a].

Captal of Buche takes the command in Aquitaine.

Death of sir Walter Manny.

[a] Froissart, Chap. ccci.

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1372. Plan of the campaign.

The operations fixed upon for the year 1372 were similar to those employed in 1370. A large army was destined to march from Calais under the command of John of Gaunt, to annoy the enemy, and defy him at the gates of his capital; while the earl of Pembroke, the king's son-in-law, was sent with a considerable reinforcement, to enable the towns of Aquitaine to hold out against any forces that might be brought against them [b].

Sea-fight of the Spaniards.

But however vigorous and extensive were the preparations on the part of England, the result was one unvaried chain of calamities. The earl of Pembroke reached Rochelle with his convoy and a considerable fleet on the twenty-second of June; but here he found an enemy waiting for him, whom he had by no means expected. Henry of Transtamare, the reigning king of Castille and Leon, had been highly exasperated at the intelligence of John of Gaunt having assumed his

[b] Froissart, Chap. cccli.

titles, and immediately by way of revenge entered into a treaty of close alliance with Charles V. of France. In execution of this treaty he sent a navy of forty strong ships to wait the arrival of the earl of Pembroke off Rochelle. A desperate battle ensued, which continued for two days, and ended in the entire destruction or capture of the English fleet. The use of artillery is said to have materially contributed to the victory of the Spaniards [c].

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Nothing could have been more critical than this disaster. The towns of Aquitaine were deprived of the expected succours; the abettors of the English party in that country were discouraged; and the scale of events, which already leaned toward the side of France, seemed now to be incapable of recovering its equilibrium. Du Guesclin, who had been appointed constable of France [d], was anxious to put a period to the war. He had already taken some considerable towns,

Its disastrous consequences.

Du Guesclin constable of France.

[c] Froissart, Chap. cccii, ccciv.

[d] Ditto, Chap. cccx.

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1372. Captal of Buche made prisoner.

when an accident occurred, not less decisive of the fortune of the English arms than the defeat of our navy. The captal of Buche, commander in chief of the forces of Edward III, was surprised in an excursion with a small party of soldiers, and made prisoner of war[e]. The garrisons of Aquitaine were left without a head, and every thing fell into irretrievable confusion. It is worth while to suspend our narrative for a moment to remark, that this gallant soldier, who thus became lost to the English, signalised a few years afterward the tenderness and warmth of his disposition, when, on receiving intelligence in his confinement of the death of the Black Prince, he refused all sustenance, and voluntarily followed his beloved master to the grave[f].

His catastrophe.

Towns of Aquitaine lost.

The towns of Aquitaine now fell rapidly into the hands of the French army. Poitiers, St. Jean d'Angely, Angoulême, Xaintes and

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[e] Froissart, Chap. cccx.

[f] Barnes, Book IV, Chap. xiii, §. 5.

Rochelle were numbered among the trophies of their success. Yet most of these places fell sacrifices rather to the gold, than the prowess, of the enemy [g]. The constable next sat down before Thouars, to which the greater part of the lords who still adhered to the English cause had retired. Under the present unfortunate circumstances however, they were speedily driven to capitulate with the enemy for leave to send intelligence of their situation to London, agreeing that, unless the king of England or one of his sons should arrive with succours in the interval, they would open their gates to Du Guesclin on the twenty-ninth of September [h].

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Siege of Thouars.

John of Gaunt for some cause had not yet sailed with his army for Calais. Perhaps, before it was completely ready, the news from Aquitaine was considered as so distressful, as to make the projected diversion in the north of France no longer advisable. Edward III. immediately ordered the army

Edward III, with the Black Prince, the king of Castille, and the earl of Cambridge sails for its relief.

[g] Froissart, Chap: cccix, cccx. [h] Froissart, Chap. cccxi.

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destined for that expedition to hold itself in readiness to sail for the relief of Thouars. In addition to its numbers he caused a general enrolment to be made of all the able bodied men throughout his realm[1]; and at length there sailed from Sandwich on the thirtieth of August an army only inferior to the memorable equipment of the autumn of the year 1359, in which Chaucer had been enlisted. The venerable old king went himself on board with his two sons, the king of Castille and the earl of Cambridge. Even the Black Prince tore himself from his chamber of sickness, and resolved once more to encounter the constable of France, whom he had formerly vanquished, but who now threatened to eclipse his martial fame.

driven back by adverse winds.

A still more extraordinary fatality pursued in this instance the efforts of the English arms. The fleet on board which this army was embarked, beat about at sea with contrary winds for nearly a month, without being

[1] Barnes, Book IV, Chap. ix, §. 20.

able to make any port in France. Edward III. saw that it was impossible to reach Thouars by the day appointed, and resolved to return home [k]. Perhaps, according to the superstition of the times, the adverse winds with which they contended, were considered as a declaration of heaven against their undertaking. It may be believed that if John of Gaunt, a young prince of high spirit, in perfect health, and only thirty-two years of age, had had the sole command, so mighty a preparation would not have returned thus ingloriously into harbour. But the old king was broken in health, afflicted at the incurable infirmity of his eldest son, had retired from the direction of public affairs, and was sunk in mind by the repeated miscarriages of his arms. Thus the obstinacy and frowardness of his age set a seal upon the loss of those provinces in France, which his prowess and vigour had formerly acquired.

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1372. He returns home.

[k] Froissart, ubi supra.

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EXPEDITION OF THE KING OF CASTILLE.—TRUCE BETWEEN FRANCE AND ENGLAND.—CHAUCER IN ITALY.—INTERVIEW WITH PETRARCA.

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THE last campaign of this eventful and disastrous war was in the year 1373. The king of Castille now resumed the plan in which he had already engaged, of a march through France. He saw how desperate the state of the English affairs in that country had become, and felt that there was no other remedy in his power. A war of sieges for the recovery of Aquitaine would probably, according to the maxims of war which now obtain, have been unadvisable; but in the period of which we are treating it was altogether impossible. Neither the revenues of

1373. Grand march of the English through France.

our kings, nor the conditions on which their armies served in the field, would allow it. CHAP. XXXV. 1373.

The English commander, at the head of thirty thousand men, commenced his expedition from Calais, and directed his march through Artois, Picardy, Champagne, Burgundy, the Lyonnois, Auvergne and Limousin, concluding this extensive course, which occupied a period of between three and four months, at Bourdeaux[a]. Though the French armies had been continually improving, in courage, and by means of the growing unanimity of every part of the kingdom, and though they were commanded by Du Guesclin, who is said to have been the first consummate general that had appeared in Europe, yet the king of Castille suffered little molestation in his march, and sustained no other losses (though these were by no means inconsiderable) than seemed unavoidably attendant upon so vast an undertaking. He hoped by so galling an insult to have pro-

[a] Froissart, Chap. cccxvi, cccxvii.

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voked the French to a battle; but this was by no means accordant to the disposition of Charles V. If he failed in this, he at least pleased himself with the idea that the plan of his campaign was what no other general hostile to France had ever executed, conceiving that, by so comprehensive an undertaking, if the issue of the war must be unfortunate, he should best preserve it from the appearance of dishonour.

Negociations.

The English army reached Bourdeaux in the beginning of November. This was the last considerable attempt on the part of Edward III. against the dominions of France. Negociations for peace were soon after opened between the two crowns; and, particularly during the greater part of the year 1375, conferences were held at Bruges, between the king of Castille and the duke of Burgundy, younger brother to the king of France [b]. But these led to no perfect conclusion. Edward III, indignant at the scan-

[b] Froissart, Chap. cccxx, cccxxii.

dalous and dishonourable way in which the war had begun, could not prevail upon himself to entertain any other terms than those of the treaty of Bretigni; while Charles V. was disposed to dictate like a conqueror, to retain all the acquisitions he had made, and to insist upon the demolition of Calais, the possession of which by the English he viewed with great impatience, as affording them at all times a ready entrance for invading his dominions [c]. Bayonne and Bourdeaux, two capital towns which we still possessed to the south-west of France, made no part of the subject of these discussions: the sovereign of that country did not yet think the English sufficiently humbled to resign such valuable possessions.

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Peace between two sovereigns, whose ideas were at present so discordant from each other, being impossible, the only expedient which offered in its place was that of a truce. This was accordingly resorted to, and after-

Truce between England and France.

[c] Froissart, Chap. cccxxiv.

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ward continued by various prolongations to the first of April 1377 [d].

1373. Reflections.

The war of 1369 for preserving the English acquisitions in France was more strenuous, and carried on with more method, perseverance and activity, than the wars in which they had been obtained. The expedition of the king of Castille in 1373 was of the same nature as those which led to the victories of Cressy, Poitiers and Azincour, but conducted with more judgment, since in those instances the French had no such general as Du Guesclin to oppose to the invader, and since it is universally acknowledged that in each of them, if the French had refused to fight, the English armies must have been reduced to surrender prisoners of war. No human abilities, with the slender and temporary resources which were then capable of being called forth, could have preserved the province of Aquitaine, against the cautious and

[d] Rymer, Tom. VII, 49 Edv. 3, Feb. 11, and Jun. 27; and 50 Edv. 3, Mar. 12.

crafty measures of Charles V, the generalship of Du Guesclin, and the prevalent disaffection of the lords and inhabitants of the country we had to maintain. Yet, such is the delusive brilliancy which attends upon success, the eulogiums are endless which are pronounced upon the lucky temerity of Edward III. and the Black Prince, while the war of 1369 is passed over by our historians with unintelligible brevity, and the astonishing march of 1373 has never received the slightest tribute of applause.

In the close of the preceding year we find Chaucer nominated an envoy to the republic of Genoa[c]. To understand the distinction which this appointment bestowed upon him, we must not consider Genoa as she has appeared in later times, but must recollect her as she was in the twelfth, thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, when she thought herself entitled to give laws to the world. Genoa, Venice, and the other mari-

Chaucer appointed ambassador to Genoa.

Importance of this republic during the reign of the Plantagenets.

[c] Appendix, No. VII.

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time states of Italy, were indebted for their consequence to the crusades, which, while they vexed and impoverished the greater kingdoms of Europe, brought to these ports, particularly by the demand they created for hiring transport-vessels, an immense acquisition of wealth and power. Narrow in its domestic territory, Genoa was great and formidable by its foreign settlements and possessions. The Genoese obtained, from the concession of the Greek emperor, the city of Smyrna in Asia Minor, and the suburb of Pera adjoining to Constantinople; and, having fortified this suburb, they were enabled occasionally to overawe the capital itself. They acquired possession of Caffa in the Crimea, of Ceuta and Tripoli in Barbary, and of the Greek islands of Lesbos and Mitylene[f]. They were not less distinguished for courage than for industry; and accordingly, while they enriched themselves by

[f] Gibbon, Chap. LXIII. Anderson, A. D. 1231, 1261, 1355.

being the brokers of the world, they diffused widely the terror of their name by the gallantry of their soldiers, and their astonishing naval victories. CHAP. XXXV. 1373.

During the reign of Edward II, and still more during that of Edward III, we find them by our records repeatedly engaged in treaties with this country[g]. The objects of these treaties are variously, compensations to the Genoese for injuries done to them by the English, stipulations for neutrality on their part during the contention between France and England, and contracts for hiring from them ships of war to reinforce our armaments. In all these treaties express engagements are entered into for the security of the merchant-ships of Genoa, while nothing of a similar nature is demanded on behalf of England; which, it has been observed[h], is a clear proof that the trade which existed between the two countries was en- Connection between Genoa and England.

[g] Rymer, Tom. III, 10 Edv. 2, Jul. 16, 18; Tom. IV, 10 Edv. 3, Jul. 4; Tom. VI, 45 Edv. 3, Feb. 1.

[h] Anderson A. D. 1372.

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tirely carried on in Genoese bottoms. During the war for the monarchy of France, the Genoese occasionally disposed of their vessels to both the contending parties. For the service of the siege of Calais in 1347 we find Edward III. hiring from the Genoese twelve gallies completely manned and equipped[i]; and in November 1372 a similar contract appears to have been made, the king having constituted by patent Peter de Campo Fregoso, brother to the doge of Genoa, commander in chief of the Genoese vessels in his service, and sir James Pronan, probably an Englishman, his lieutenant[k].

Genoese squadron hired by Edward III.

Objects of Chaucer's embassy.

Judging from the rank of the admiral of this squadron, we may conclude that the aid thus hired from the Genoese was by no means inconsiderable. Meanwhile, the republic having frequently found occasion to complain of the depredations committed upon them by the less commercial and more lawless

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[i] Rymer, Tom. V, 21 Edv. 3, Apr. 13.

[k] Ditto, Tom. VI, 46 Edv. 3, Nov. 22, 28.

English [1], this was deemed a fit time for placing the mercantile connection of the two countries upon a more unquestionable footing. Accordingly, in the following month, a commission was made out to three persons to proceed as envoys to Genoa, for the purpose of agreeing upon some town or spot on the sea-coast of our island, at which the Genoese might establish a regular factory; as well as for ascertaining the franchises, liberties and immunities, to be enjoyed by the citizens of the republic, in their intended English factory, and in all other places of the kingdom to which they might resort for the purposes of commerce. The envoys were three: first, sir James Pronan was taken from his station as vice-admiral of the Genoese auxiliaries, to be put at the head of the embassy: the second in the enumeration is John de Mari, a citizen of Genoa; and the third Chaucer. The Italian in some respects ap-

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His colleagues.

[1] Rymer, Tom. IV, 10 Edv. 3, Jul. 4; Tom. VI, 44 Edv. 3, Nov. 28, Dec. 6.

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pears to have been made of more importance than either of his associates, since it is provided that any two of the three envoys shall be competent to conclude upon any point to which their joint powers extend, with this express condition, that John de Mari shall in all cases be one of the concurring parties. If, as is most likely, some place in England was finally agreed upon by these commissioners as an *entrepôt* and factory for the merchants of the republic of Genoa, it is probable that the name of the particular port selected for this purpose is now no where to be discovered. We have here then a further example of the consideration with which Chaucer was treated by his contemporaries. Sir James Pronan, a knight during the prevalence of chivalry and a vice-admiral, must certainly be regarded as a person of rank; of John de Mari we know nothing specifical in this respect, but we find him, as to the essentials of the embassy, put before sir James Pronan. Chaucer was deemed, in these days of chivalrous ostentation and disdain, a fit person to be associated in their mission.

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1373. His tour of the north of Italy. Clerk of Oxenfordes tale.

Chaucer, the business of his embassy being concluded, made a tour of the northern states of Italy. The proof of this lies in the verses with which he introduces the clerk of Oxenfordes narrative in the Canterbury Tales, which the speaker informs the company he

> Lerned at Padowe of a worthy clerk,—
> Fraunceis Petrark.
>
> CANTERBURY TALES, ver. 7903.

Now it happens that we possess information respecting this tale in the letters of Petrarca, enabling us with sufficient evidence to reduce this slight hint into a point of history, and to fix its chronology. The narrative attributed to the clerk of Oxenford, is the well known and exquisitely pathetic story of Patient Grisildis, perhaps the happiest of all the effusions of Chaucer's muse. Petrarca expresses himself thus on the subject in a letter addressed to Boccaccio, of the date of the eighth of June 1373 [m].

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[m] De Obedientia et Fide Uxoria: Opera, Ed. Bas. 1581, Tom. I, sub finem.

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" Your work of the Decamerone fell for the first time into my hands in an excursion I made to Arqua a few weeks ago. Not having had time to peruse the whole, I did as ordinary readers are accustomed to do, fixed my attention principally upon the commencement and the conclusion. The description with which you set out, of the condition of our common country under the visitation of the plague, appeared to me equally just in the conception and pathetic in the execution. The narrative with which your work concludes [the tale of Grisildis] particularly struck me. When I considered that this story had affected me deeply in the hearing many years ago, and that you had regarded it with so much approbation as to be induced to translate it into Italian, and even to place it as the crown of your performance, where we are taught by the simplest rules of rhetoric to put whatever we regard as strongest and most persuasive, I was confirmed in the inclination I felt to confide in my present feelings. I therefore readily yielded to the propensity which impelled me to translate it into Latin,

with such variations as my fancy suggested; and I now send the translation to you, in the hope that you will not entirely disapprove of what I have done."

CHAP. XXXV. 1379.

The coincidence of this letter with the period of Chaucer's embassy, may sufficiently convince us that what he makes the clerk of Oxenford say of having learned the tale from Petrarca at Padua (where Petrarca then resided) is to be construed as applying to himself. But this construction fortunately comes confirmed to us by several other circumstances.

The story is told by Boccaccio in his Decamerone, a performance with which Chaucer was familiarly acquainted, and is even so far honoured by the author of that production, as to be placed by him last in his work, as the crown and completion of his series. Why did Chaucer chuse to confess his obligation for it to Petrarca, rather than to Boccaccio, from whose volume Petrarca confessedly translated it? For this very natural reason: because he was eager to commemorate his interview with this venerable patriarch of

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Italian letters, and to record the pleasure he had reaped from his society. Chaucer could not do this more effectually, than by mentioning his having learned from the lips of Petrarca a tale which had been previously drawn up and delivered to the public by another. We may defy all the ingenuity of criticism to invent a different solution for the simple and decisive circumstance of Chaucer having gone out of his way, in a manner which he has employed on no other occasion, to make the clerk of Oxenford confess that he learned the story from Petrarca, and even assign the exact place of Petrarca's residence in the concluding part of his life.

Motives of Chaucer in this excursion.

It is not possible for us at this distance of time to ascertain whether Chaucer travelled across the northern part of Italy, from the Mediterranean sea to the Adriatic, principally to visit the great laureated poet of that country, whose fame during his own lifetime was perhaps louder and more awe-inspiring than ever fell to the lot of any other mortal; or whether he was partly

moved by the desire of beholding the other great maritime state of the fourteenth century, the rival of Genoa the Proud, Venice, which was only twenty-two miles distant from the residence of Petrarca. On the road also he might visit Mantua, the birth-place of Virgil, Verona, which had given existence to Claudian, and many other places profusely adorned with the witchery of nature, or rendered mysteriously interesting by the associations of former times. The visit to Petrarca however is the only incident of this journey which Chaucer has thought fit to transmit to posterity. CHAP. XXXV. 1373.

Interview with Petrarca.

Petrarca was at this time nearly seventy years of age; and he survived only by twelve months the visit of the English poet. It must have been a striking object to Chaucer, to behold this grey-headed, yet impassioned, poet in a period when the gift of poetry was so exceedingly rare; this correspondent of popes, of states, and of emperors; this poet who had been crowned by Paris and Rome, and from whose compositions Chaucer's infant lips had perhaps first drunk in the nu-

Feelings of Chaucer on this occasion.

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Feelings of Petrarca.

merousness of verse. Petrarca was interesting to Chaucer, because Chaucer saw in him as it were the lineal descendant of the Ciceros, the Virgils and the Ovids of Italy in the days of its classical greatness. Chaucer was interesting to Petrarca for a different reason. He came from the *ultima Thule*, the *penitus toto divisos orbe Britannos*[a]; that country which the wantonness of more genial climates among the ancients had represented as perpetually enveloped in fogs and darkness. To later times the literature and poetical genius of Britain is familiar; no tongue so barbarous, as not to confess us the equals, while in reality we are in intellectual eminence the masters, of mankind. But this was a spectacle altogether unknown in the times of Petrarca. The discovery he made was scarcely less astonishing than that of Columbus when he reconnoitred the shores of the Western world. He interrogated his guest; he proposed to him his most trying

[a] Virgil. Bucolica, Ecl. I.

and difficult criterions; he exchanged with him the glances of mind, and the flashes of a poet's eye. Chaucer had already written his Troilus and Creseide, and many of his most meritorious productions; he was more than forty years of age; we may imagine how he answered the ordeal of the Italian, and stood up to him with the sober and manly consciousness of a poet to a poet. Petrarca hesitated, suspected, and at length became wholly a convert; he embraced the wondrous stranger from a frozen clime, and foresaw, with that sort of inspiration which attends the closing period of departing genius, the future glories of a Spenser, a Shakespear and a Milton. CHAP. XXXV. 1373.

He reads to Chaucer his tale of Patient Grisildis.

We are fortunately in possession of a clue which may explain to us the tone of the conversation which passed between Petrarca and Chaucer. Petrarca had just finished his version of the tale of Grisildis. He had put it into the hands of one of his friends, a citizen of Padua. His friend attempted to read it aloud; but he had no sooner got into the incident of the tale than he found him-

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self obliged to desist; his voice was choaked with tears. He repeated his trial with the same effect; after a little while sighs and groans overpowered his utterance. Petrarca made the same experiment upon another of his friends, a Veronese, who read the story from beginning to end without the slightest change of accent or attitude. Petrarca, surprised at the contrast, asked his friend the reason. "Oh," said the Veronese, "I should have wept as much as my neighbour, had I not known the story to be a fable. But it is impossible to be true. There is no such woman; there never was a woman who could stand such trials, and show herself so inaccessible to the approaches of frailty."

Tone of their conversation.

Petrarca read this tale to Chaucer. This is a proof of the opinion he formed of our countryman. When an old man is persuaded to repose a perfect confidence, and to feel an entire sympathy, he opens his heart, he tells the subject of his last efforts and meditations, he pours out the ideas of which his thoughts are full. It was thus that Petrarca treated Chaucer. He put him instantly upon the

footing of his ancient friends, and read to him what he had just before communicated to the Paduan and the Veronese. Chaucer was entranced. The magic of a tale, perhaps the most pathetic that human fancy ever conceived, heard under the sacred roof of him in whom the genius of modern poetry seemed to be concentred, and from the aged lips of him to whom that roof was indebted for its sacredness, was all together a surprise, a feast, a complication of sentiment and of pleasure, such as it has fallen to the lot of few mortals to partake. Having heard the tale, Chaucer requested of Petrarca permission to take a copy of it. So much is implied, when he makes the clerk of Oxenford say that he

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Chaucer requests a copy of the tale.

> Lern'd it at Padowe of a worthy clerk,——
> Fraunceis Petrark.

Under the person of the clerk of Oxenford Chaucer has contrived, probably for the sake of increasing the identity in this particular, to have in several respects a reference to himself. Thus,

describes himself under the person of the clerk of Oxenford.

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For [o] him was lever han at his beddes hed
A twenty bokés, clothʼd in black or red,
Of Aristotleʼ, and his philosophie,
Than robés riche, or [p] fidel, or sautrie.

CANTERBURY TALES, ver. 295.

Chaucer has repeatedly informed us of his love of reading, and his propensity to read in his sleepless hours in bed. Again,

Not a word spake he more than was nede;
And that was said in forme and reverence;

. . . . . .

And gladly wolde he lerne, and gladly teche,
ver. 306.

is introduced by Petrarca to an acquaintance with the works of Boccaccio.

A further illustration of the literary history of Chaucer suggests itself to us in this place. If Chaucer learned the history of Grisildis from Petrarca at Padua (and it would imply an idle and wanton imputation upon the veracity of Chaucer to doubt it), it then follows, though Boccaccio began his Decamerone shortly after the plague in 1348, that

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[o] he would rather have. [p] fiddle, or psaltery.

the work was not yet sufficiently familiar to the most enlightened and studious part of the English public in 1373, for Chaucer to be aware of the contents of the most admirable story it contains. Chaucer "lerned it of Petrark;" he was therefore unacquainted with it previously to that time. If Chaucer in 1373 had little or no knowledge of what has ever been the most popular work of Boccaccio, what probability is there that in his youth he translated the Troilus and Creseide, and the Palamon and Arcite, from the versions of that author? Chaucer was early conversant with the writings of Petrarca[q]; but the unrivalled fame of Petrarca threw for some time a sort of obscurity upon the more natural and unpretending effusions of his Florentine contemporary. It is not improbable that Chaucer carried home with him from this tour the Decamerone, and perhaps the other works of Boccaccio. Petrarca told him from whose volume he had translated

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[q] Troilus and Creseide, Book I, ver. 401.

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his tale: the venerable patriarch of Italian poetry informed Chaucer; that the goodness of his friend's heart could only be equalled by the eminence of his genius, and assured him that he would reap abundance of delight from the perusal of his performances. Chaucer on his part must have felt no little curiosity to become acquainted with the writings of a man who had written in volumes of Italian verse, two stories which had formerly occupied a considerable portion of his own lucubrations.

The visit of Chaucer not mentioned by Petrarca or his biographers.

Mr. Tyrwhit has objected to the credibility of the interview with Petrarca here described, that he "cannot help thinking that a reverential visit *from a Minister of the King of England* would have been so flattering to the old man, that either he himself or some of his biographers must have recorded it[r]." But this objection is easily answered. Petrarca was certainly not deficient in vanity; but his vanity had been fed at various times

Silence of Petrarca accounted for.

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[r] Introductory Discourse, note 20.

with viands more flattering than "a reverential visit *from a Minister of the King of England.*" If indeed Petrarca had received this visit in early or in middle life, when his vanity was most alive and eager for enjoyment, and when he poured out his feelings, and the little incidents of a studious life, in voluminous letters to his friends, we may easily believe that the visit of Chaucer would have been found an event of sufficient magnitude to be recorded by his pen. But there is a period in human life, when vanity, like all the other passions, ceases from its restlessness and its craving, and when gratifications which before would have raised the soul into a tumult of enjoyment, but just serve to ruffle for a moment the quiet surface. This might well be the case with Petrarca, when he was within twelve months of the close of a feverish and agitated existence. Most of the friends too to whom he had been accustomed to vent his garrulity were gone before him. And, what is sufficiently remarkable, the letter to Boccaccio, which was in all probability written previously to the

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visit of Chaucer, appears to be the last letter the aged poet ever wrote. Petrarca found, or imagined, that his letters were intercepted and opened on the road by men of taste, for the purpose of transcribing the ingenious sallies, or the flashes of eloquence, with which they should happen to be interspersed. At length, he says, the marauders grew weary of this modest and orderly species of theft, and retained his paquets, that they might save themselves the trouble of transcribing them. Disgusted at this violation of the laws of civilised life, hostile to all the confidence of intercourse and society, he formed the determination to write no more. This resolution he announces in the letter in question, in which he takes his leave in form of his friends and of correspondence: "*Valete, amici; valete, epistolæ.*"

of his Italian biographers.

As to the biographers of Petrarca, the reader who has examined the account which De Sade gives of his predecessors, will not be surprised at any anachronism, omission or absurdity, of which they may have been guilty.

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Language of De Sade on the subject.

The case of De Sade himself as to the point in question, is still more singular. In the preface to the second of his three extensive quartos, he has announced his intention of proving to his readers that Chaucer was in connection *(en liaison)* with Petrarca; but this engagement he has not performed in the sequel of his work. Mr. Tyrwhit in consequence "suspects that his more accurate researches have not enabled the author to verify an opinion, which he probably at first adopted upon the credit of some biographer of Chaucer[*]." But this is not the only, nor the most natural, solution. De Sade has not advanced his statement precipitately; not in the preface to his first, but to his second volume. The promise being made when this volume was published, could only refer to the sequel of the work. But the author at length became alarmed at the labour, or the gigantic appearance, of his production. In the third volume, published three years later

[*] Introd. Discourse, n. 20.

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than the second, he has entirely changed his plan. He had divided his history into six books, of which the first two volumes contain three, while the other three are compressed into the remaining volume. In this concluding volume he has entirely suppressed his Appendix of Notes and Illustrations. He professes also to have omitted all details which were not absolutely essential to his subject. It is easy to conceive then that the particulars which related to Chaucer may have been among those he omitted.

What were the documents, if any, which De Sade refers to on this subject, I have not been able to discover. Perhaps they yet exist in manuscript in the curious collections of this nature in Italy or France.

Conclusion.

But, be this as it will, a man must have Mr. Tyrwhit's appetite for the fascinating charms of a barren page and a meagre collection of dates, not to perceive that the various coincidences enumerated; — Chaucer representing the speaker as having learned his tale from Petrarca at Padua, though it was previously the property of Boccaccio; Padua

being then Petrarca's actual residence; the embassy of Chaucer to Genoa in 1373; and Petrarca having, in that very year translated the tale into Latin prose;—not to perceive, I say, that these coincidences furnish a basis of historical probability, seldom to be met with in points of this nature.

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WICLIFFE APPOINTED TO NEGOCIATE WITH THE POPE'S COMMISSIONERS AT BRUGES.—CHAUCER RECEIVES A GRANT OF A PITCHER OF WINE *PER DIEM* FOR LIFE.—HIS PROBABLE INCOME.—HIS MORAL AND SOCIAL HABITS.—IS APPOINTED COMPTROLLER OF THE CUSTOMS.

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THE question of the papal provisions and
1373. reservations, notwithstanding the several acts of parliament which had been passed on the subject, was as yet far from being settled. The affair was of a peculiar nature: the clergy of the different states of Christendom at this time acknowledged two independent heads on earth; and it was therefore by no means considered as the token of a discontented and turbulent disposition, if on any particular occasion they avowed the necessity

under which they were placed to obey the pope, and to disregard the injunctions of the sovereign and legislature of their country. This in our eyes perhaps may seem a violent and factious proceeding; in theirs it was sober and grave and decent, and tended to raise, not to degrade, him who adopted it, in the opinion of the most respectable of his contemporaries. The question therefore of the pope's reservations could only be settled by mutual negociation and compromise, between the head of the church on one part, and the temporal monarch of the kingdom in which it was agitated on the other.

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Perceiving the necessity of this system of proceeding, the English government, now as it should seem under the exclusive influence of the king of Castille, prepared a solemn embassy to the pope at Avignon, to endeavour to adjust with him by an amicable accommodation this important affair[a]. The

Embassy to the pope on the subject of his provisions.

[a] Cotton, ad ann. Rymer, Tom. VII, 48 Edv. 3, Mar. 11, Mai. 4 and Jul. 26.

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principal in this embassy was John Gilbert bishop of Bangor, accompanied by one knight and one regular and one secular clergyman. The pontiff who now presided in the holy see was Gregory XI, who had been raised to the papacy in the room of Urban V, in January 1371 [b]. All that these ambassadors could obtain from the pope was his assent to a congress to be held on these points at any place which the court of London should think proper to name, to which he agreed to send certain persons authorised for the purpose, to meet the commissioners and plenipotentiaries of the king of England [c].

1374. Account taken of the benefices held by foreigners.

The place fixed upon for this congress was Bruges. But, previously to the nomination of the ministers of Edward III, the king issued his writ, as he had once before done in the year 1347 [d], to the bishops in their different dioceses, requiring them to make a return of all ecclesiastical dignities or bene-

[b] De Sade, ad ann.

[c] Cotton, ad ann. Rymer, ubi supra.

[d] Cotton, ad ann.

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fices held by Italians and other foreigners, of the value of these benefices, the names of the incumbents, and whether the holders were resident or non-resident[e]. An ample return having been made to this requisition, the king proceeded in July 1374 to appoint his representatives to the congress; and these consisted of seven persons, the bishop of Bangor as before being at the head, and Wicliffe's being the second name in the commission[f].

Ecclesiastical congress at Bruges.

Wicliffe one of the commissioners.

This is to be considered as undoubtedly bearing no favourable aspect upon the papal claims. Wicliffe was a man who, almost from the time when he had first been heard of, had been distinguished by his opposition to the incroachments of the court of Rome. He began as the champion of the university of Oxford against the mendicant friars, and his zeal led him to a very rough and severe invective against these fraternities, whose in-

[e] Fox, Acts and Monuments, Vol. I, ad ann.

[f] Rymer, 48 Edv. 3, Jul. 26.

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terests the pope had ever deeply at heart. His next public effort was his argument against the tribute imposed by king John upon the realm of England; by which he had strongly recommended himself both to the sovereign and the parliament. He had been appointed, as we have seen [g], by Islip archbishop of Canterbury, warden of Canterbury Hall in Oxford, of which that primate was the founder. To make room for Wicliffe, Islip had turned out of the wardenship Henry de Wodehal a monk [h], either on account of some private misunderstanding, or because the archbishop was determined to take the part of the university against the regular clergy. Islip died in 1366, and was succeeded by Simon Langham bishop of Ely, who was raised to the primacy by a papal provision [i]. Langham, himself a regular, and who had been abbot of Westminster, was led by professional feeling to take part with the

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[g] Chap. XXXIII.

[h] Lewis, Chap. I.

[i] Godwin: archiepiscopi Cant. cap. lv.

displaced warden; and one of his first official proceedings [k], in defiance of the act of the founder of the college, had been to issue an archiepiscopal mandate to restore Wodehal, and to expel Wicliffe and the seculars from Canterbury Hall. This ejectment, after a tedious negociation before pope Urban V, was confirmed by that pontiff in 1370 [l]. Wicliffe however by no means sustained any diminution of his credit with the university from this circumstance; and, two years after, he was elected their professor in divinity [m], by which style he is described in the king's letters patent appointing him to the congress at Bruges. What were the topics and the style of his professorial lectures at this time we are not told; we shall presently have occasion to observe what they were on his return from his embassy.

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Harsh treatment he experienced from the pope.

Is made divinity-professor to the university of Oxford.

In the month of April this year Chaucer had a grant conferred upon him of a pitcher

Chaucer receives a grant of a pitcher of wine *per diem*.

[k] Lewis, ubi supra.

[l] Mandatum Apostolicum Urbani V, apud Lewis.

[m] Lewis, Chap. II.

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of wine *per diem*, to be delivered daily in the port of the city of London by the king's chief butler, during the term of his natural life [n].

Observations.

Some amusement, and even instruction, perhaps may arise, if we digress a little on this occasion into the consideration of the value and object of this grant, and of the manners and style of living of our ancestors, as illustrated by this incident.

Use of wine in the fourteenth century.

It is a great mistake to suppose, as we find it represented in several common books, that wine continued to be sold in England as a cordial, by the apothecaries only, till after the year 1300. To go no further back than to the accession of the Plantagenet race in 1154, the English government at that time gained possession of Bourdeaux and some other important places to the south-west of France, which with little interruption they continued to hold for three centuries. Hence we drew considerable supplies of this commodity. The

[n] Appendix, No. VIII.

consumption of Thomas earl of Lancaster for the year 1313 has already been mentioned [o], amounting in one year to one hundred and eighty-four tuns. In this particular then, as well as in most others relating to diet, the old English gentry lived generously; and, if wine conduces in any degree to expand the imagination, neither Chaucer, nor perhaps the writers of the old romances who went before him, wanted this sort of aliment to nourish their poetic heat. CHAP. XXXVI. 1374.

What appears to be an authentic record of the price of wine at the close of the twelfth century occurs in Stow's Chronicle, under the year 1199. "King Iohn," says this historian, "made a law, that no tunne of [p] Rochell wine should bee solde dearer then xx. shillings, of Anjow for xxiiii. shillings, and of France xxv. shillings, and not above, unleses the same were of such principal goodnesse, Its price in 1199.

[o] Vol. I, Chap. VII, p. 104.

[p] In the *Annales Burtonenses*, where this precept is recorded, the term is Poitou wine, *vinum Pictavense*. Ann. Burt. ad ann.

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that some for their use would give [q] twenty sixe shillings foure pence for the tunne, and not above in any case. A [r] gallon (by retale) of [s] Rochell wine to be sold for 4 pence, the [r] gallon of white wine not above vi pence. It was also ordeined, that in everie citie, towne and place where wyne was used to be solde, there should be xii. honest men sworne to have regarde that this assize shoulde not bee broken: and if that they found any vintner that should sell any wine by small measures contrary to the same assize, his body should be attached by the sheriffe and detained in prison, till order was taken for his further punishment, and his goods seized to the kings use: and the like punishment was appoynted for such as should sell by the tunne, hogshead, or otherwise, contrary to the assize."

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[q] Two marks. Ann. Burt.

[r] Sextarius. Ann. Burt. Fleetwood (Chron. Prec. Chap. IV.) infers that this measure must have exceeded a gallon, since, at £. 1 *per* tun, the price of the gallon ought not to have been more than one penny.

[s] Poitou. Ann. Burt.

In Rymer we find a proclamation of Richard II, of the date of 1383[1], still further calculated to throw light upon the subject. It is addressed to the mayor and sheriffs of the city of London, and has for its object to inforce the execution of an act of parliament of the preceding year. It directs that no tun of the best wine of Gascony, Oseye or Spain shall be sold for more than one hundred shillings, and wine of an inferior sort from those countries for no more than six, six and an half, or seven, marks respectively; and it fixes at an inferior rate the assize of Rochelle wine, the lowest price being four marks. It further determines the retail price of the *lagena* of wine at six pence and four pence according to the quality of the wine. The term *pipa*, or pipe, of wine also occurs in this proclamation, and was probably used in the old document of the expenditure of Thomas earl of Lancaster in 1313, as it is employed

[1] Tom. VII, 6 Ric. 2, Feb. 3.

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by Stow in his report of that document [u], where it seems clearly to mean the half of a tun, as at present.

Measures of wine at this time in use.

The word in the proclamation of Richard II. which I have translated tun, is in the original *dolium*; and in this sense, I apprehend, this Latin word is constantly used in our old records. The *lagena*, as appears from the above statement, is rated at the two hundredth part of the price of the tun, and may therefore reasonably be supposed to correspond to our modern gallon [x], of which there are two hundred and fifty-two in a tun. This excess of fifty-two may be considered as no more that an equitable allowance to the retail trader, for the waste occurring when we divide a larger weight or measure into a multitude of smaller, and for the greater trouble and expence attending upon a retail trade in proportion to the capital employed.

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[u] Survey of London: of orders and customs.

[x] The word is thus explained by Fleetwood, ubi supra. He adds that from *lagena* comes the word *flagon*.

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The translation given by our Latin-English dictionary-makers of the term *lagena*, is flagon, or flask, which will probably be admitted to correspond pretty exactly to the more customary English word pitcher. These two, the *dolium* and pitcher *(pycher)* are the only two measures of wine occurring in the grants to Chaucer; and, their sense being fixed, the inferences to be made will then proceed without difficulty. In like manner, the *dolium* and *lagena* appear, in the proclamation of Richard II, to be the two great wholesale and retail measures of wine used at that time. We seem then to have sufficient ground to conclude that the *lagena* and *pycher* exactly correspond to each other, and, if there be any force in the reasonings of the last paragraph, that they are each of them commensurate to our modern gallon of eight pints.

Dimensions of the pitcher.

It is probable that the wine given by the king, and directed to be delivered by the hands of his chief butler, was intended to be of the first quality. One gallon *per diem* appears from the proclamation of Richard II, which was only nine years posterior to the

Value of Chaucer's grant.

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1374.

grant to Chaucer, to have been rated as nearly equal in value to two tuns, or £. 10, *per annum*. Hence we collect a trivial illustration of the vicissitudes of our poet's fortune. In 1374 he has a grant of one pycher *per diem*, or £. 10 a year. In 1378, the first year of Richard, he has twenty marks, or £. 13 : 6 : 8 *per annum*, in compensation of this wine[y]. And in 1398, having been compelled by distress, ten years before, to dispose of these grants, he has a tun of wine *per annum*[z], which, if its value had not risen from the time of the proclamation before quoted, was not worth more than £. 5. It has already been mentioned that the money of that time may be computed to be equal to eighteen times the money of the same denomination at present; so that, if we are to take the price fixed by the proclamation of Richard II. upon the best wine, as a measure of the value of Chaucer's grant, he may be considered as having now obtained a second life-annuity

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[y] Appendix, No.

[z] Appendix, No.

of £. 180, in addition to the life-annuity of £. 240 granted to him in the year 1367. CHAP. XXXVI.

1374. Imputed connection between wine and poetry.

It is a curious question to examine, how far this grant of wine was connected with the association of ideas, which has prevailed, perhaps ever since the times of Homer and Anacreon, of a certain alliance between the juice of the grape and poetry. I find a grant, or rather the confirmation of a grant[a], of Edward III, in the first year of his reign, to Mary, his aunt, daughter of Edward I, of ten tuns of wine *per annum*, toward her sustenance. But the princess Mary was a votaress, and cannot be supposed to have wanted ten tuns of wine annually for her own consumption; and the phraseology of the grant [*in subventum sustentationis suæ*] seems to imply rather that it was a commodity to be given in exchange for other commodities, than to be consumed in kind by the grantee. Chaucer's wine was almost certainly intended for the poet's immediate use. Whatever

[a] Rymer, Tom. IV, 1 Edv. 3, Feb. 25.

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might be the motive in which this grant originated, it is likely that the grant of a tierce of wine [the third part of a pipe] annually to Ben Jonson, and something similar to other poets-laureat since his time, has sprung from this allowance to Chaucer, in the same manner as the burial of poets since his time in a certain compartment of Westminster Abbey has originated in the accident of his being buried there.

Probable amount of Chaucer's income.

The circumstance of Chaucer's receiving his allowance of wine daily, seems to afford a considerable presumption that it was consumed from day to day as it was received. From this fact we may derive a reasonable inference as to the extent of Chaucer's fortune. We find him consuming four pipes of wine annually, the price of which, stated in modern denominations of money, was £. 180, or £. 45 *per* pipe. The question then which it is necessary for us to examine is, what may be taken to be the whole annual expenditure of a man, whose consumption is to this amount in the single article of wine? It seems to be the height of absurdity to

suppose that Chaucer's entire disbursements under every other article were comprehended within the limits of his pension of twenty marks, that is, of £. 240 of modern money. Proceeding upon this datum of his grant of wine, we cannot with probability take his entire revenue at this period at a lower valuation than £. 1000 of modern money, which, reduced into the denominations of Chaucer's time, is £. 55 : 11 : $1\frac{1}{3}$.

What then were the items of which this income was composed? Beside his pension and his grant of wine, he had also the grant of a house near the Royal Manor House at Woodstock. Taking the rent of the house a man lives in at the tenth part of his income, Chaucer's house at Woodstock may be estimated, in modern denominations of money, at the value of £. 100 *per annum*. This with his annuity at £. 240, and his grant of wine at £. 180 *per annum*, constitutes a revenue of £. 520. It is also not unfrequent for the grant of a house to be accompanied by certain other perquisites, tending to assist the holder in his means of subsistence. Still

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however there will remain considerable resources to be supplied, to raise Chaucer's income to the amount above specified. These, as was hinted on a former occasion [b], may most obviously be supplied by the supposition that Chaucer inherited a paternal fortune adequate to the ordinary purposes of subsistence. Nine years elapsed between the time when we know that Chaucer occupied the house granted him by his sovereign on the verge of Woodstock Park, and the date of his first pension: and we must perceive it to be impossible that Chaucer should have tenanted a house, which we have found equal in accommodations to a modern house of the rent of £. 100 *per annum*, at a time when he was destitute in other respects of the necessaries of life.

His paternal inheritance.

Thus, by a collation of circumstances, we seem to have arrived at a reasonable basis of inference respecting the external situation of Chaucer, and the figure, as to opulence and

[b] Chap. XIX, p. 105,

rank, which he made in the eyes of his contemporaries: and the conclusion is that, from the thirtieth year of his age, at latest, his situation was that of a certain degree of competence and ease, while, by the munificence of his sovereign, and the attachment and affection of John of Gaunt, he continually rose, as we shall have further occasion to observe in the sequel, to a still higher degree of opulence. CHAP. XXXVI. 1374.

His moral and social habits.

Another inference not less important to the illustration of the life of Chaucer, is supplied to us by the grant of a pitcher of wine daily, which we are here discussing. We may reasonably expect to derive some light from it upon the moral habits and social character of the receiver. When we meet with a grant of ten tuns of wine *per annum* to a nun, this is to be considered abstractedly only, as property to a certain amount. But the case of the grant to Chaucer is not similar. The man who receives what we should now call four bottles of wine a day from the king's cellar, may fairly be considered as a consumer of wine to that amount. If it had

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His temper gay and convivial.

not been intended for actual consumption, it would have been given under a different form. Chaucer therefore, it appears, was a man of a gay and convivial temper, who, it may be presumed, seldom sat down to the principal refreshment of the day, without the society of two or three chosen friends, whose manners and topics of conversation were congenial to his own. To Chaucer's table then we may with sufficient propriety apply the verses in which Beaumont has celebrated the convivial meetings he had been accustomed to hold with Shakespear, Fletcher and Jonson.

What things have we seen
Done at the Mermaid! heard words, that have been
So nimble, and so full of subtle flame,
As if that every one from whence they came,
Had meant to put his whole wit in a jest,
And had resolv'd to live a fool the rest
Of his dull life; then when there hath been thrown
Wit, able' enough to justify the town
For three days past, wit, that might warrant be
For the whole city to talk foolishly

Till that were cancell'd; and, when that was gone, CHAP. XXXVI.
We left an air behind us which alone 1374.
Was able' to make the two next companies
Right witty; though but downright fools, mere wise.

VERSES OF BEAUMONT TO JONSON, annexed to the Comedy of the Nice Valour or the Passionate Madman.

A further inference as to the moral habits of Chaucer, which may be collected with sufficient evidence from the documents here referred to, and others which will hereafter be produced, is that he was, with respect to his domestic economy, a man of expensive habits, and not unfrequently exposed to pecuniary embarrassment. Chaucer appears to have loved travelling, to have loved society, and to have loved to see himself surrounded with gay, good-humoured and warm-hearted friends. We may reasonably believe that his society was select. On a former occasion we entered into a review of the character and history of two of his most intimate com- inclined to expence.

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panions [b], and these may well be received as a specimen of the rest. Chaucer was by no means deficient in all the refinement that the age in which he lived could afford; he was a courtier, a gentleman, and a man versed in literature, taste and the fine arts. But, within these limits, he delighted to unbend himself, and to enjoy all those relaxations and amusements which to the delicate mind inspire additional zest, in consequence of the canons of criticism and good sense to which they are subjected. The bent of his mind in this respect is sufficiently visible in his works, particularly in the work of his maturest years, the Canterbury Tales; where it is usually, and perhaps justly, remarked that the parts which are tinctured with a certain degree of broad and salacious humour, such as the Millers Tale and the Reves Tale, together with the Wif of Bathes Prologue, are inferior to nothing in the collection. The coarseness which we may be inclined to impute to these

and to pleasurable indulgences.

[b] Chap. XVII.

productions, is ascribable to the poet's age, and not to the poet. In a word, Chaucer was an individual little disposed to monastic austerities; and, though he certainly never wallowed in the mire of sensuality, or forfeited his consequence with his compatriots by dishonourable indulgences, yet he had senses and faculties qualifying him to enjoy all the temperate pleasures of existence, and he was not of a character to refuse himself any gratifications which an enlightened and unfettered judgment might approve. CHAP. XXXVI. 1374.

habitually a courtier.

We have already seen great reason to believe that Chaucer inherited by birth a moderate competence. If therefore he had not been decisively of a pleasurable turn, if he had not been a man somewhat too little inclined to deny himself those pleasures which were not exactly within the limits of his personal means, he would probably never have been a courtier, or at least not a courtier in that eminent degree in which we find him to have been such. By this principle his public history is easily and naturally explained. Whether Edward III. or his queen

His introduction into public life.

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Philippa were the first spontaneously to recognise the splendour of his talents, or this circumstance were pointed out to them by another, it is impossible for us to pronounce. But we may easily perceive that his first coming to court was in the character of a man of unparalleled endowments, of great worth, and of a frank and noble temper, somewhat too much fettered and narrowed in his circumstances; and as such, a person peculiarly proper to be chosen as an object of royal munificence. The king accordingly placed him about the person of a favourite son, invited him to attend upon the hours of royal recreation, and gave him a house within sight of one of his most favourite retreats. Two years after, he led Chaucer with him to the field in an invasion of France, and probably gave him an honourable post in the armies of his country. The next favour Chaucer received from his sovereign was the pension, the value of which has been formerly discussed. He was afterward employed upon a secret mission to the continent; and, a year or two subsequently to this, ap-

His successive promotions.

pointed in a public character one of the English envoys to the republic of Genoa. In addition to these distinctions, he received in the present year a grant of a pitcher of wine daily, to be delivered to him during the term of his life by the hands of the king's principal butler. CHAP. XXXVI. 1374.

Still however Chaucer's fortune was not equal to the openness and liberality of his disposition. In about six weeks after the grant of wine above mentioned, he received a much more considerable mark of the royal bounty, in the appointment of comptroller of the duties of customs in the port of London [c]. Is appointed comptroller of the customs.

What was the value of this office it is not easy precisely to ascertain. It may be considered in two points of view; as to the salary annexed to the appointment, and the degree of consideration ordinarily yielded to the person who held it.

From an inspection of the official rolls in which the patent grants of the kings of Eng- Importance of this situation.

[c] Appendix, No.

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land in these times are recorded, it appears that there were two contemporary officers to whom the superintendence of the duties of customs was principally confided: these are, the clerk, and the comptroller. The superintendence of the king's works was in like manner intrusted to two persons with similar denominations. By an examination of these grants it will be found that the comptroller in each of these departments officiated as treasurer, or, more accurately speaking, that it was on his *visum* and attestation that the accounts of the clerk were settled. Proceeding upon these premises, it has been suggested to me by persons versed in affairs of this nature, that the comptroller was the principal officer, and that the emoluments of his place may reasonably be concluded to have been the greatest of the two.

Salary annexed to it.

Chaucer, in consequence of the intrigues and convulsions of the reign of Richard II, forfeited his office of comptroller of the customs; and, when, some years after, he was restored to favour, he received in lieu of it the appointment of clerk of the king's

works [d]. It has been conceived, and we shall see strong reasons to confirm this opinion hereafter, that the emoluments of the latter of these offices were not equal to the emoluments of the former. Chaucer's salary as clerk of the works is stated in the patent of his appointment to have been two shillings *per diem* [d]; that is, £. 36 : 10 : — *per annum*, or, in denominations of modern money, a yearly income of six hundred and fifty-seven pounds. If then we suppose his revenue, independently of this office, to have been equivalent to one thousand pounds *per annum* of modern money, we shall see sufficient reason to consider Chaucer as placed at this time in a situation of comparative opulence and splendour.

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Nature of its business.

We have formerly referred to Mr. Tyrwhit's comment upon Chaucer's grant of the patent office of comptroller of the customs [e]. This critic infers, from the circumstance of Chaucer being required to keep the accounts

[d] Appendix, No.

[e] Chap. XIX, p. 97.

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of his office with his own hand, that Edward III. " was either totally insensible of his poetical talents, or at least had no mind to encourage him in the cultivation or exercise of them."

This inference has already been repelled in the place where we first had occasion to mention it. Another answer arises, now that we are brought to the fact in the ordinary course of our narrative. Edward III or his queen paid an honourable homage to the splendour of Chaucer's poetical talent in the year 1358 or earlier, when he received from them the donation of a house at Woodstock. It would indeed be harsh reasoning, if what the king did in kindness to Chaucer sixteen years afterward, should forfeit the fair reputation and equitable construction of what he had previously done in the full vigour and maturity of his judgment.

Chaucer owes this appointment to the king of Castille.

But let us further recollect at what period it was that Chaucer obtained the office of comptroller of the customs:—just three years before the death of Edward III, at a time when the king had almost entirely withdrawn

himself from the cares of state, when the political power of Chaucer's friend, John of Gaunt, was nearly absolute, and when accordingly no year passed without Chaucer receiving from the government one or more substantial marks of the favour with which he was regarded. Mr. Tyrwhit therefore should have transferred the charge of insensibility to Chaucer's genius, from Edward III, to this illustrious prince, whose confidence in Chaucer was unlimited, and whose friendship for him was unalterable. The commentator certainly might have spared his subtle refinements upon the exalted talent of patronage, as well as the apposite quotation from Milton which he adduces to show, that, though Edward III. were deaf to all the witcheries of poetry, he was himself endowed with a true discernment of its beauties [f].

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It is easy to account for Chaucer being

Motives of the donation.

[f] The quotation is from the Mansus:

Neque enim, nisi charus ab ortu
Dis superis, poterit magno favisse poetæ.

ver. 72.

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appointed to the place of comptroller of the customs; an office, the business of which he not equivocally insinuates was little agreeable to his disposition [g]. Chaucer aspired to a generous style of living and a liberal income. His patron felt the sincerest inclination to meet his wishes in this respect. Yet he scrupled to provide for him under the direct form of an ample pension. Though John of Gaunt, and a few persons touched with the love of literature and the muses, knew what was the honour due to a poet, the bulk of the British nobles of this period cannot be supposed to have entered into these feelings. Nor were the old English barons endowed in a high degree with a pliant spirit, or much accustomed to suppress the comments which public measures excited in their minds. They would have murmured, and loudly, if they had seen a plebeian, who was drawn from the haunts of trade, maintained, in what they would have called

[g] House of Fame, Book II, ver. 144.

idleness, with an income equal to that of many of the high-born peers of the realm. Every one knows the style in which they addressed their sovereign in the reigns of Henry III, Edward II. and Richard II. John of Gaunt had a delicate part to perform amidst an aristocracy of this sort; and he was not inexperienced enough to imagine that he had nothing to consult in affairs of government but his own inclination. CHAP. XXXVI. 1374.

There is a further reason why John of Gaunt might naturally desire that Chaucer should hold an official situation. It was not his habit to play the idle part of a patron; he rather wished to place the talents he loved, in active employments. This is sufficiently apparent in the case of Wicliffe. He probably held to Chaucer a language something like this: "You are in the full vigour of your age and constitution. That this vigour should be employed in the service of your country, will be equally advantageous to you and to me. The reins of the English government are confided to my hands; I ought not to withdraw myself from this responsibility, Chaucer's ministerial character.

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if I desired it. I want your advice; I want the assistance of your talents. I shall often feel prompted to consult your admirable judgment, the rectitude of your views, and your knowledge of the world and of the human heart; and it is more frank and manly that the man whose counsels I pursue should fill an ostensible office, than that he should be my adviser secret and unavowed. You owe yourself to your country and your friend; and I require this at your hands. On the other side, if you desire poetical fame, your compliance with my wishes will assist your attainment of that object. Man is a complex being, and is affected with mixed considerations; and your contemporaries will listen with far different feelings to your beautiful and elevated productions if they flow from an ambassador and a minister of state, than if you remained obscurely sheltered under your natal roof in the city in which you were born, or sequestered among the groves and streams which adorn your neighbourhood at Woodstock."

His domestic,

There was yet another reason why Chaucer

might desire wealth and a situation calculated to excite the respect of the world. He had been for some time married, and was now pretty certainly a father: Thomas Chaucer, speaker of the house of commons in the second year of Henry IV, must by this time have been born. In his person his illustrious father raised a family; and it is but fair to infer that what he actually did, he previously intended to do. From this time therefore we are to consider Chaucer in a new point of view. His situation was no longer a doubtful one. He no longer, in the contemptuous phraseology of Dr. Johnson[h], "hung loose upon society." He appeared in two ways under a character which mankind are prone to regard with a certain degree of esteem. He was the reputable master of a family, embracing within its limits the principal of those natural charities which have so mysterious and irresistible a power over the human heart. And he was a man in office and

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and official situation.

[h] Lives of the Poets: Pope.

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authority, whom many approached as solicitors, the equity of whose decisions many waited with anxiety, and who might expect, accordingly as he should conduct himself, to be pursued with curses, or looked up to with thoughts of gratitude and blessing, by multitudes.

Supposed grant of the year 1371.

Beside the grants to Chaucer already enumerated, a question has also arisen of another. This is mentioned in the Life prefixed to Urry's edition in these terms: "Not long after [the pension of 1367], we find him gentleman of the king's privy chamber, and by that title the king granted to him by letters patents dated in the forty-fifth year of his reign, the further sum of twenty marks *per annum* during life." Mr. Tyrwhit, speaking of the same particular, says, "Mr. Speght, who omits this grant [the pension of 1367], mentions one of the same purport in the 45 E. III. in which Chaucer is styled *Valettus Hospitii*, which he translates—*Grome of the Pallace*[1]."

[1] Preface, Appendix C, note d.

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It is curious to trace the ebbs and flows of veracity in different authors, treating of subjects of this sort. The biographer, coadjutor of Urry, states, as we see, the assertion of Chaucer receiving from Edward III. a second grant of twenty marks *per annum* during life, in the most direct and unqualified manner; leaving his readers to discover as they can, whether his assertion be founded in official records, or in the personal effrontery of the writer. Mr. Tyrwhit, though equally erroneous in his statement, has furnished a clue enabling us to detect the misrepresentation both of him and of his predecessor.

Biographia Britannica.

But the most remarkable way in which this supposed fact of a second pension is represented, is in the article of Chaucer in the Biographia Britannica. The writer of this article copies *verbatim* the sentence above quoted from Urry's coadjutor. He does not however stop here. He inserts in his margin a reference to substantiate his assertion, in this form, "45 Ed. III. p. 3. m. 7;" established abbreviations, which, put into words at length,

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signify "Patent Rolls of the forty-fifth year of Edward III, part (or roll) the third, membrane (or skin) the seventh." Thus he boldly cites the highest authority which can be exhibited in a matter of this sort, to confirm his assertion.

Its forgeries.

How then does the fact itself stand? The patent rolls of the forty-fifth year of Edward III. are two only; there is no third part. That I might completely establish or refute the statement of the Biographia, I imposed upon myself the unnecessary task of looking through the patents of that year. There is, as might easily have been conceived, no such patent. The whole reference is of that sort which is best known by the appellation of "a fabrication of history." And this in a work, which purports to be a monument of our national literature. It is so printed in the edition of 1748. It so stands without change or examination in the edition of 1784. We shall have several further occasions to animadvert upon the forgeries which occur in the article of Chaucer in the Biographia Britannica.

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Source from which they sprung.

We are thus reduced to the single authority of Mr. Speght, upon which it is easy to perceive that the statements of the coadjutor of Urry, of Mr. Tyrwhit, and of the Biographia, are entirely founded. Now Mr. Speght's reference is to the *Pellis Exitus Scaccarii* of 45 E. III [k]; and, as he takes no notice of, and had never seen, the patent grant of 1367, it is not difficult for a careless reader, after the patent of 1367 had been brought to light, to regard the statement of Mr. Speght as referring to a second grant to the same amount, four years subsequent to the former. But what is the fact? The *Pellis Exitus Scaccarii* is "a skin recording the issues of the exchequer;" and therefore the reference of Mr. Speght is not, as he hastily styles it, to a grant of 45 E. III, but to Chaucer's receipt in that year for a payment of money upon a grant previously existing. A similar receipt we shall have occasion to produce in another place. The statement

[k] Speght's Edition; Life of Chaucer; his rewards.

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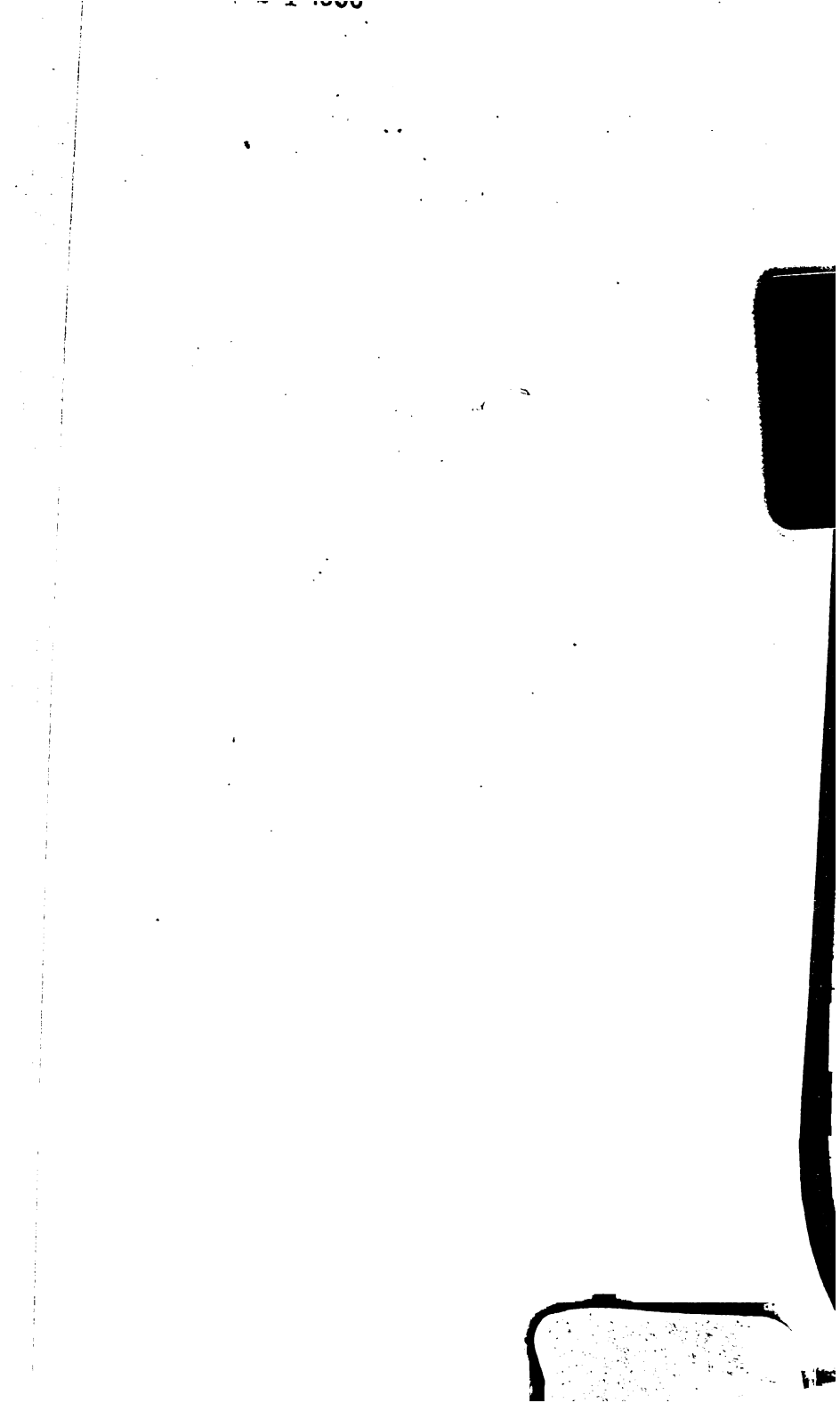
of Mr. Speght therefore, when duly examined, affords not the slightest foundation to the idea of a second pension granted to Chaucer, in the year 1371.

There is however one thing remarkable in the record produced by Mr. Speght, and that is the addition by which Chaucer is designated, *Valettus Hospitii.* This term can scarcely be construed as meaning less, than that the poet actually possessed an appointment of some kind, not yet traced in the records, in the royal houshold.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

T. Davison, White-friars.